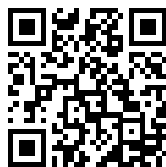

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DISCOURSES,
CHIEFLY DOCTRINAL,
DELIVERED IN
THE CHAPEL
OF
TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN.

BY
BARTHOLOMEW LLOYD, D.D. S.F.T.C.D. M.R.I.A.
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OF IRELAND.

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TO THE
RIGHT REV. WILLIAM KNOX, D.D.
LORD BISHOP OF DERRY;
AS A SMALL TRIBUTE OF GRATITUDE,
FOR KIND ATTENTIONS CONTINUED THROUGH MANY YEARS;
AND IN TESTIMONY OF HIGH ESTEEM FOR THE TALENTS
BY WHICH HIS LORDSHIP IS DISTINGUISHED,
AND THE PUBLIC SPIRIT, BY WHICH THEY HAVE BEEN EVER
DIRECTED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE BEST INTERESTS OF HUMANITY :

The following Discourses,

ARE INSCRIBED,

BY HIS LORDSHIP'S FAITHFUL

AND VERY HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

IN offering the following Discourses to the Public, it may be fit that something should be premised, respecting the views with which they were written.

It has been the lot of the Author, among various duties of an academic life, to be called, not unfrequently, to the task of addressing the students, on the subjects of their Theological Studies, as a Preacher in the College Chapel. Being, in that capacity, charged, with the instruction, of those who were to become the Clergy of the land, he conceived he could not improve such opportunities better, than by exposing those sectarian errors, by which the peace of the

Church has been so much disturbed, and such numbers drawn off from the benefits of the Establishment. In a country, where every novelty is zealously recommended, it would become necessary for his hearers, to fortify those who should be committed to their guidance, against every misinterpretation of Scripture: and it has been the object of the writer, whilst endeavouring to strengthen the persons addressed, to assist them to “strengthen their brethren.”

The extremes of those errors (*i. e.* of those into which Protestants have diverged,) are those of the Antinomian, on the one hand, who reduces the Christian profession, to a speculative belief in certain points of doctrine; and those of the Unitarian, on the other, who sees in the Gospel, nothing but a system of moral duties, enforced indeed by the declarations respecting a future state of retribution, but divested of all those powerful motives, which belong to the doctrines

^a Luke xxii. 32.

relative to the corruption of man, and the nature and offices of the Being, by whom, his deliverance is effected.

The space between these extremes, is filled up, with a variety of shades, melting into each other, by insensible gradations. The Calvinist who, by the dogmas on arbitrary decrees, and unconditional election, approaches to the Antinomian, labours hard to repel the imputation of such connexion; by endeavouring to shew, that these doctrines, as held by him, do not weaken any of the motives to exertion, which reason has discovered, or Revelation presented. And the Arian, who discards some of the most spiritualizing doctrines of Christianity, is no less anxious to maintain the vitality of his system, in opposition to that of the Unitarian.

Now as these various systems cannot be, all of them, exact transcripts of the word of God; and as the subjects, on which they differ from each other, are those of the

highest importance ; the Author of these pages has felt it to be his most sacred duty, indiscriminately, to resist the encroachments of error, without any regard to the names with which it might be connected.

In the conscientious discharge of this duty, he has not wantonly hurt the feelings of any sincere advocate of the opinions he has controverted : and in vindicating the truths of the Gospel, he trusts he has not widened the breach among Christians, by the asperity of polemic disputation. It seems to him, that the cause of truth is, in general, better advanced, by a direct exposition of its principles, than by a refutation of error : that though in a war of physical force, strong excitement may be as requisite, as it is unavoidable, polemic acrimony has never won over an adversary : and that as the great enemy to reason is passion, there is more of zeal than of discretion displayed, in rousing the angry feelings of an opponent. Accordingly ; his main object has been, to represent the Articles of Belief, relative to the points in

question, by the lights of Scripture ; and when he has adverted to its perversions, he has carried his hearers no farther, than seemed to be absolutely requisite for the purpose of safeguard.

Such has been his aim in writing the following Discourses, and such were the views by which he was directed. The author is far from thinking, that he has handled the matters, therein discussed, with a fulness commensurate to their vast importance. What he has delivered, was intended as a preservative for minds not as yet infected, rather than a sanative for those already tainted with sectarian errors. These hints, such as they are, he deemed it advisable to publish ; in order that if they should meet the observation of some person, in the enjoyment of more leisure or better qualifications, they may be further pursued.

His opinion that his efforts will be deemed of service, by any, is not unmixed with much doubt : but he ventures to express

a hope, in submitting this work to the Public, that, notwithstanding the defects of its execution, it may be received with that kind indulgence, which usually marks their decisions, when satisfied of the goodness of the intention.

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DISCOURSE I.

ON FAITH, ITS NATURE AND OFFICES.

HEB. xi. 1.

*Faith is the substance of things hoped for ; the
evidence of things not seen.*

AMONG the Professors of Christianity, it is in vain that we look for unanimity, if it is not to be found in what relates to those tenets which all regard as fundamental ; yet even in these, how short is the line of coincidence, before that they separate into ramifications almost endless !

The necessity of faith in Christ, is acknowledged by Christians of all sects and denominations ; but when we attempt to examine their opinions, as to the nature and origin of this fundamental principle, we find that all unanimity is at an end.

By some, it is understood to be a mere assent of the mind, to the truth or certainty of the matters revealed : by others, an operative principle, productive of all the virtues, which are to adorn the Christian character in the present life, or to crown it with glory in the next.

B

By some, it is regarded as the seal of our acceptance, impressed by the hand of God on those whom he hath previously elected : by others, as the condition or qualification, required on our parts, before that we can be admitted to the benefits of the Christian dispensation. By some, it is held, that having no natural affinity to any thing on this earth, it grows by the sole but all-sufficient grace of God ; without any dependence on the soil in which it is sown, or the culture with which it is cherished : and that as its growth is neither promoted nor counteracted by these circumstances ; its operations, like those of its Almighty Author, are unresisted and unfailing. There are more who maintain that, like every other gift of the same God, this principle of faith may be not only resisted, but rendered unavailing, by the depravity of the human heart, whether natural or superinduced : and that even when not utterly choked or exterminated by the strength of our natural appetites or passions, it may yet be overpowered or impoverished, so as to bring forth no fruit to perfection : and accordingly, that faith in Christ is professed by many, who very sparingly exhibit in their lives, any of those fruits which should spring from it in such luxuriance ; and even by multitudes, whose conduct places them far below the level of those, who profess to be governed by the maxims of mere worldly prudence.

Nor is this diversity of tenets without its effect

on the code of moral truth, which constitutes the practical part of Christianity ; for the notion of faith, according to which, the human mind is regarded as a mere recipient, is resisted by some, as being unfavorable to human exertions ; the seal of our acceptance, according to this notion, being a confident assurance on our parts, that we are among the number of those, whom God hath unconditionally elected. Whilst the scheme, in which, faith is represented as a principle of action, capable of being resisted, or liable to be outweighed by contrary motives, according to the entertainment which they receive, or the manner in which they have been cherished, is supposed by others to favour too much the notion, that salvation is the reward of human merit ; a prize to be won by our exertions. Would it be supposed, that opinions so incongruous, could be derived from the same authority ; or that their abettors had, in common, any test to appeal to ? Yet they do appeal to a common authority, which is nothing less than the unerring word of God.

The all-sufficiency of a principle of belief seems to be asserted in a variety of texts, of which it will suffice to select a few examples. When our Lord commissions the Apostles to promulgate the glad tidings of salvation, his instructions are, that they should go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature : adding, " He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be

saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned ^a.”

Peter, preaching to the Gentiles, in the same manner declares, that “whosoever believeth in Christ shall receive remission of sins ^b.” And in the same strain, is the language of St. Paul; “through this man is preached unto you forgiveness of sins, and by him, all that believe, are justified from all things ^c.” And when the keeper of the prison at Philippi, struck with the miraculous deliverance of Paul and Silas, demands of them what he must do to be saved; the answer he received, was simply this; “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house ^d.”

On the other hand, we learn from our Lord himself, that the seed of the word sown in the heart, even when it attains to a certain growth, may fail; being beaten down by the storms of persecution, uprooted by temptations, or choked by the thorny cares, which belong to the occupations or possessions of this life. In the same spirit, St. Paul insists on the necessity of other virtues; in language, which strongly implies the persuasion, that faith may be unproductive, and therefore ineffectual. He declares, that though he had faith, so that he could remove mountains, and had not charity, it should profit him nothing ^e. From which it would appear, that the Apostle did not trust to the all-sufficiency of this prin-

^a Mark xvi. 16.

^b Acts x. 43.

^c Ibid. xiii. 38, 39.

^d Ibid. xvi. 31.

^e 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

ciple; as he might have done, had he regarded the Christian character, as the necessary result of its spontaneous developement: or, if any doubt remains respecting the fairness of this inference, it may be effectually removed by the exhortations contained in the same epistle, wherein the Apostle labours to enforce on his Corinthian brethren, the necessity of vigilant self-command: comparing that which is required in our Christian warfare, to the painful discipline, submitted to, by those who aspired to the prizes in their far-famed contests; and finally, recommending his precepts by his own practice, the result of his experimental convictions; telling them, that he found it necessary to keep his body in subjection, lest by any means, after that he had preached to others, himself should be a castaway^f. In the same strain of admonition, St. Peter presses on the Church, the necessity, of adding to their faith, other qualifications both moral and intellectual.

But time would fail me, were I to attempt to set in array the various passages of Holy Writ which have been adduced in support of these jarring opinions; nor is it requisite for my present purpose: enough has been advanced, to shew that an enquiry into the nature of Christian faith, is, even at this day, not uncalled for; and that it becomes us to conduct it with sobriety and peace.

^f 1 Cor. ix. 27.

To you, my young friends, whose alliance with religious parties will probably be courted, and who may shortly be called on to bear a part in these discussions, the subject of our present enquiry seems peculiarly inviting. It has, however, a far higher claim to your attention. It is of the highest importance, to settle betimes your opinions on the fundamental articles of your religion ; that among all the mazes of error, you may direct your course, steadily, towards that end, which the Gospel sets before you—your true resting place. This is, chiefly, what I would affect, in what I shall now offer for your consideration : and if in this attempt, to lay before you the genuine doctrine of Scripture, on the subject of religious faith, it may be requisite to call your attention to those errors from which it is to be disengaged ; I trust it may be possible to fulfil this part of my duty, without infusing into your breasts, any portion of that acrimonious spirit, with which, such discussions are too frequently conducted : more especially, as it may be expected, that the clear apprehension of the nature and operation of saving faith, will enable us to discern, in the opinions respecting it, what is correct, and what is erroneous ; and in the different admixtures of truth and error, to ascertain how far they are severally conducive to our spiritual sustenance.

In order that we may ascertain, what is meant

by Christian faith, in the more proper use of this expression, it should be observed, that the declarations which have been made to us in the Sacred Writings, may be classed under two distinct heads.

The first consists of the accounts of certain occurrences, which are said to have been witnessed ; among which, those things are particularly prominent, which our Lord himself is said to have done, spoken or suffered. Those facts, whether ordinary or extraordinary, being matters of human observation, were capable of human testimony ; and therefore the evidence on which they are received, is similar to that on which we admit the certainty of any other facts transmitted to us by history : the same in kind ; whatever advantage it may have in fulness or strength.

It is scarcely necessary to observe, that our reception of the things, thus conveyed to us in the ordinary channels of communication, is not, itself, that faith, with which, the promises of the Gospel are connected. For what avails our belief, that certain doctrines were taught by our Lord and his Apostles, if the doctrines themselves are not assented to ? Of what benefit is it, to believe, that Christ did actually suffer on the cross ; if we do not also believe, that Satan was thereby precipitated as a star from heaven ; and the communication between man and his Maker, again laid open ? Nay, what avails our admission, that occurrences, antecedently the most improbable,

were accurately predicted ; that the most extraordinary miracles were actually performed ; if we receive not the instructions of those teachers, whose commission from above, was established by these credentials?

That this is the proper use of miracles, is abundantly manifest, from the numberless places in the Old and New Testaments, in which they are so applied. On such testimonials, Elijah requires the assent of the idolatrous Samaritans, to the communications he was commissioned to make to them, relative to the nature and worship of the true God. To such proofs St. Peter alludes, when he directs the Christian converts, to be ready to give to every man, a reason of the hope that is in them^c. And on these grounds, our Lord himself does not refuse to rest his claims to a Divine mission, when he appeals to the works which the Father had given him to finish. “ The works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me ^b :” and again, “ If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not ; but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works ^d !”

These occurrences therefore, however extraordinary, are not the objects, on which, our belief is ultimately to rest. They are but the groundwork, from which we are to ascend to the contemplation of other matters, which cannot, in the

^c 1 Pet. iii. 15.

^b John x. 25.

^d John x. 37, 38.

same manner, be offered to human observation. Such are the doctrines taught, by those whose divine commission was thus established, both with respect to the adorable perfections of God, and his gracious purposes towards us; comprehending all that belongs to the dispensation of mercy, in the mystery of redemption; whereby, being released from the dominion of sin, and rescued from spiritual death, we are made the inheritors of eternal life.

These doctrines belong to the second of the two heads, into which the Sacred Writings have been divided: and being truths, such as are either not at all, or at least not fully discoverable by our natural powers, they are properly the subjects of revelation, and the articles of faith.

The facts recorded in Scripture being admitted, it seems impossible, that we should withhold our assent from the truths they were intended to establish; however removed beyond the reach of our faculties to discover, or even to comprehend distinctly, when revealed. Accordingly, it is in disputing these out-works, that the infidel endeavours to maintain his unequal contest: here he labours to make a lodgment; well knowing, that if this post is abandoned, he has no ground to stand upon.

But the truth of the Scriptures being established to our fullest conviction, it may well be

questioned, whether saving faith is the necessary consequence; and, (though there is no rational mode of refusing our assent to testimony so supported,) how far our thoughts are necessarily engaged, by the things so established and recommended.

There are not wanting proofs of the existence of a power to draw back from these things, and to refuse them that entertainment, which is due to their acknowledged importance. We know that even the eye-witnesses of the miracles performed by the Apostles, found means, not to disprove the facts or reject their consequences; but to turn aside from the consequences which they found it necessary to admit. For we are told of those hardened Jews, that “they conferred among themselves, saying, what shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them, is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it^k.” In the same manner, we have it recorded, that when our Lord had shewn his power, in restoring Lazarus to life, the chief Priests and Pharisees convened a council, not to ascertain whether the divinity of his mission was thereby established; or whether they were, in reason, bound to receive him as their instructor: as there could have been no doubt, so there appears to have been no question made of this. The subject of their deliberations was, how they might

^k Acts iv. 16.

prevent the light which they could not but acknowledge, from breaking upon the minds of their deluded followers. For they said, "what do we? for this man doeth many miracles, and if we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him!".

From this and many other such occurrences, it appears, that Christian faith, is neither the admission of the facts recorded in Scripture, nor the necessary consequence of that admission: we may go much farther, and assert, that it does not terminate in the mere recognition of our Lord's person and character: nay, that the admission of the truth and importance of the doctrines taught by our Lord and his Apostles, does not, of itself, constitute that faith, required by him as the condition of the mind, to which the outflowings of his mercy are to be directed.

Faith, indeed, implies this admission; but the character of Christian faith is more energetic. In the very place where it is stated, that "whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God^m;" we find it also asserted, that "whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faithⁿ." Again: Take the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked^o, is the direction of the

^l John xi. 47, 48.

^m 1 John v. 1.

ⁿ 1 John v. 4.

^o Ephes. vi. 16.

Apostle, wherein he characterizes that faith which is profitable to salvation.

It is in vain, therefore, that the Antinomian would identify that faith, with a simple assent to the doctrines taught in the Gospel ; and still more vain his attempt, to restrict it to the admission of one single doctrine, however important : for surely it belongs to the Gospel, which declares what are the privileges of faith ; to specify, not only, the objects of that faith ; but also the nature of the entertainment which it designates by this appellation. We have seen that a mere assent, though founded on the fullest conviction, does not satisfy its demands : and if we can moreover shew, wherein a mere assent is deficient from that entertainment, which is requisite to give effect to the truths presented in the Gospel ; nothing substantial will remain for disputation, relative to the nature of saving Faith ; any further controversy on this part of the subject, must be merely verbal ; having no other object, than to fix, in each particular instance, the precise import of the term faith ; which, like every other, is used with some latitude.

This our object, may, I think, be attained analogically ; by considering the authority of reason itself, and what may be requisite beyond a simple decision of the judgment, to render its representations effective : for if in the motives discoverable by our reason, it is possible to discern the

cause of their occasional failure ; or the manner in which they should be represented, to become efficient ; the same observations may be applied to the motives presented to our Faith : the constitution of the human mind being the same, however different the motives presented to it. I would therefore beg leave, for the illustration of the difficulty before us, to direct your thoughts, to the acknowledged interests of the present life ; and the entertainment, which is requisite to establish their influence, in the direction of our conduct.

Now in the constitution of man, we discern a sensitive and a rational nature ; the one shews itself in the perceptions and appetencies of his senses ; the other exerts itself in tracing connexions, in anticipating consequences, and in forming an estimate of the balance of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, calculated for an extent, which is that of his mental vision : I mean that, wherein the objects can be depicted by his imagination, in colours sufficiently strong and impressive.

In obeying the solicitations of sensual appetite, he rises not above the level of the inferior animals, by which this earth is inhabited. But when his maxims of conduct are formed on that more extended plan ; when his pursuits are directed, not towards the enjoyments of the present moment only, but towards that balance of satisfaction, at-

tainable in the period comprehended within the scope of his rational faculties ; he shall be frequently required to resist the invitations to voluptuous self-indulgence ; to conquer his inclinations to sloth and supineness ; to throw off all incumbrances ; and apply himself to the pursuit, with an exertion of his powers, at once laborious and protracted. Now, what reason is to sense, faith is to reason itself : for by directing our views beyond the limits of the present scene, it gives a suitable enlargement to our plans of conduct ; teaching us that we are not to live, as if for the present moment, or even for the present life alone, but also for that which is to come, lengthened even to Eternity : and in the pursuit of that which is to constitute the happiness of this endless existence, it instructs us, not only to resist the solicitations of sense, but even to abjure the guidance of unassisted reason, when the schemes it would recommend, are found to militate against those higher interests, or the principles of conduct which are requisite for their security.

To proceed with this analogy : as a person aware of the consequences of intemperance, is not always secured thereby from such a course ; so we may conceive it possible, that a man convinced of the truth of the Gospel, and of the reality of the condition it offers to his hopes, may yet be led aside from the pursuit, by the solicitations of sensual appetite, or the lures of worldly interest

or ambition. The cases are parallel ; and the same account is to be given for his failure in either. We know that the processes of reason are often slow and laborious ; and therefore easily and frequently interrupted ; and that its conclusions when attained, are often but faintly apprehended. Whilst on the contrary, the immediate objects of sense, not only offer themselves to the notice of the most inactive mind ; but apply themselves to the faculties of perception, and therefore also to the imagination, with a force often hazardous to our worldly interests. In like manner, the pleasures and interests of the present world are palpable and comparatively near at hand ; whilst those of the next, retire from the view, and are lost in the obscurity of distance. The former also are suited to our faculties of apprehension ; the latter are scarcely to be discerned by a spirit whilst immersed in the flesh.

But whilst we recognize a close similitude between our temporal and eternal interests, with respect to the dangers with which they are threatened, it must be acknowledged that the risks we incur with respect to the latter, are by much the greater : because, whilst worldly prudence is encountered by sensuality only, Christian faith is beset by a two-fold host ; by the desires of the sensual and those of the worldly spirit ; not only by the lusts of the flesh, but by the lusts

of the eye and the pride of life ; and this, whilst the motives by which it is to be animated, are removed to a greater distance. This last also, would appear to be a great disadvantage. To place ourselves under a temporary restraint, or to excite ourselves to a short lived exertion, such as may suffice when the prize is placed at no great distance, is comparatively an easy task ; but the longer our course, the more difficult to sustain the necessary resolution ; our minds become occasionally relaxed and inattentive, and the danger is increased, by the temptations which belong to the increased number of intervening objects, soliciting our affections, and diverting our thoughts.

In this condition, it is evident, that the simple conviction of the reality and importance of the things revealed to us, is not sufficient for our security: and it remains to be considered what kind of entertainment it is, which gives to our convictions the character and influence of saving faith. This is, evidently, a question of the same sort, as if it were demanded, what is required, beyond a mere acknowledgment of our temporal interests, to give to them a suitable influence on our lives and conduct? which it is not difficult to answer.

It has been stated, that it is the office of reason to penetrate into futurity, to anticipate remote results, to bring together and compare probable occurrences, as distant in time as in place, and

to suggest the rules of conduct, which are best calculated, for the security of all those interests which lie within the scope of its discernment.

But this is not all : it belongs to the same faculty also, and it is no inconsiderable part of its office, to present these things to the imagination, so as to raise as lively an apprehension of what is yet far off, as of occurrences actually present : not merely to convince us, that what is now future, will become present ; and will then affect us as sensibly as what we now suffer or enjoy : but, as it were, to annihilate the intervening distance ; and to impart to things future, all the impressiveness of objects actually before us : and not only to suggest the measures and rules of conduct, in relation to the entire scene thus exhibited to the imagination, but to press these measures with the whole weight of its authority. For the effectual discharge of these important duties, it must acquire such an ascendancy over the natural inclinations ; and by the constant recommendation of its principles and maxims, it must settle the approbation of them so strong in the mind ; that the impressions made by present objects, may not find us weak and unprovided ; or the appetites and passions easily roused to rebellion.

In a manner strictly analogous to this ; it belongs to faith, which extends its views beyond the boundaries of the present life, into every part of eternity ; and offers to our hopes, the happiness,

not of any limited portion, but of the entire of our existence here and hereafter ; to improve the conviction of the reality and importance of these interests, into an abiding and habitual persuasion : to kindle the desires for those things ; and thereby to give to them such forcible possession of the mind, that they may, as it were, rise spontaneously into view on every necessary occasion ; and in spite of every opposing sollicitation, determine the will.

It belongs also to faith, which points to the power and goodness of God, as the unfailing source of these blessings ; and to the indications of his will, for the course by which we are to be conducted, and finally put in possession of these things ; to follow up this illumination of the mind, by suitable impressions on the heart : to advance the discoveries of his power and goodness, into fear and love ; that filial reverence in which all the strongest affections of the soul are united : to improve the apprehensions of his will, into the most unreserved confidence in the guidance he hath afforded, more particularly in his Holy Word ; whereby we may be disposed and enabled, to lay at his feet, the most ardent wishes of the heart ; and not only to mortify and subdue the most urgent appetites of sense, but even to relinquish those false interests, which unassisted reason would sometimes recommend, if the course by which

they are to be attained, is such as will not accord with the dictates of unerring wisdom.

You see then, my friends, the operation of saving faith : to dispel the clouds which bound the present existence : to enable us to contemplate the things revealed, undiminished by remoteness ; and apprehend them in all their reality, their truth, and their importance : to establish them in the undisturbed possession of our thoughts, and thereby procure for them such an habitual ascendancy over the mind, that if possible, they may never be dislodged by the interests or enjoyments of the present life : to incline us to make a full surrender of our hearts to God, as the supreme object of our affections ; to take for our support his power, and for the rule of life his will, as manifested in his Holy Word : that in passing through the present stage of our existence, we may regard it as a preparatory state, amply furnished, indeed, with the means of instruction and opportunities of discipline ; but containing no object worthy of engrossing the desires, or of retarding the progress, of a spirit created for immortality.

Such was the victorious faith of those worthies, of whom we are told, that “ having seen the promises afar off, they were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth ^p.” And such

^p Heb. xi. 13.

is the faith described by the apostle, when, as in the text, he defines it to be "the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen." The lively anticipation of things hoped for, that gives to them all the substance and reality of things now in possession; conferring even here a foretaste of future felicity. This is the faith by which he tells us that he himself was guided; "we look not," (saith this glorious example of Christian faith,) "we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen, are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal^a;" "for we walk by faith, and not by sight^r."

But the terms of every language whatsoever, admit of some variety of signification; the import in the particular instances of their application, being, for the most part, discoverable by the context. The name of the principle we have been considering, is not an exception to this general licence; for even in Scripture, its signification is not inflexibly the same. If this variation in the use of this term is attended with danger, it is only to the disingenuous; who, as if for the purpose of wresting the Word of God to their own preconceived theories, will not scruple to detach certain passages from the subject to which they belong, and by which, any ambiguity of expression, is most successfully elucidated.

^a 2 Cor. iv. 18.

^r Ibid. v. 7.

We may therefore easily anticipate certain changes in the signification of the term in question ; and this, in the strictest conformity with the established usages in every language ; if we consider, that though faith is unchangeable in its character, it does not appear to be so, in its vigour or activity ; and that if there be any complexedness or variety in its objects, there must be a corresponding variety in the direction of its views. Accordingly, when by an easy change, the term is transferred from the power itself, to any particular exertion of that power ; the special application, though readily notified by the context, is not to be discovered without it.

Now the legitimate objects of Christian faith, are the promises of deliverance or of inheritance : God the author and giver of all good things : and the means he hath provided for the accomplishment of his work of mercy ; including, more especially, the atonement by the death of Christ ; his mediatorial office, and his superintending providence.

When the eye of faith is directed to the promises of deliverance or of inheritance, the attainment of everlasting life, and of blessings, beyond the compass of any adverse power to corrupt or to divert ; this virtue is scarcely to be distinguished from Hope. Indeed the intimate connexion between faith and hope is plainly indicated in the text ; wherein the Apostle, describing the

nature of Christian faith, represents it, not merely, as the full apprehension of things undiscoverable by our natural faculties, but also, the lively anticipation of things hoped for. This anticipation when strengthened, may amount to confident, though still humble expectation ; which is then put to the test, when for these objects, we are required to renounce the pleasures, or forego the advantages of this life. In this sense it is applied, when it is said, that “ by faith, Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ, greater riches than the treasures of Egypt ; for he had respect unto the recompence of reward¹. ”

Indeed, such is the connexion between these two qualities, that they are not seldom spoken of indiscriminately, as when it is said, that “ we are saved by hope², ” and “ by faith we are justified³. ” I would not be understood to assert, that these are one and the same thing. The expectation of any possession, implies that our thoughts are directed towards it, with a belief of its reality. Therefore faith is an element of hope ; or rather it is the foundation of this, as of all Christian virtues. Still, however, when the things believed and contemplated, are the promises of God ; hope

¹ Heb. xi. 24—26.

² Rom. viii. 24.

³ Gal. iii. 24.

is, necessarily, the condition of the mind engaged in these contemplations ; which is the connexion here spoken of.

Considering then, how prone to error, men have been in their conceptions of this matter; we shall not be surprised to find, that by some, faith is supposed to be a personal assurance of salvation : and if we object to this definition, it is not because of the confusion between faith and hope ; but because of the presumption, by which, this latter is carried to an extent, exceeding that, for which we can find any warrant in the word of God ; even where faith has had its perfect work, of love and filial obedience ; receiving as the seal of its acceptance, the spirit of adoption, which casts out all uneasy apprehensions. A similar limitation is required for that definition of faith, whereby it is represented, as an application to ourselves of the merits of Christ ; or a persuasion, that they are imputed to us by the Father. This application we are entitled, neither to make nor to expect, in any other sense than this ; that by the merits of Christ, our peace is made with God, and the gate of mercy is unlocked, through which we are now invited to approach the throne of grace ; and to receive those gifts of his Spirit, which are to qualify us for the possession and enjoyment, of that everlasting inheritance, he hath so provided for us.

Again : when the eye of faith is directed to God,

from whom all good things do come ; it becomes reliance, on that truth, wisdom, and power, which no other power can disappoint or controul. In this acceptation it is used by our Lord himself, as when St. Peter, about to sink in the waves, is re-proved for the weakness of his faith, “ Wherefore didst thou doubt * ? ” And again : when, having given to his disciples a most signal proof, that his protection was sufficient for their security, by allaying the tempest which had alarmed their apprehensions, he chides them for their want of faith. “ How is it that ye have no faith † ? ” And again ; in his sermon on the Mount, wherein he inculcates the reasonableness of absolute reliance on the providence of God, by an allusion to his care of the vegetable creation ; requiring of his hearers to make the application : “ Wherefore if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith ‡ ? ”

When the eye of faith is more immediately directed, as it is frequently in Scripture, to Christ ; it is an acknowledgment of him in all those offices which are connected with the work of salvation ; as the Eternal Word by whom we were created ; the Lamb, by whose blood we are redeemed ; the Captain of our salvation, to whose guidance we must commit ourselves, and whose commands we

* Matt. xiv. 31.

† Mark iv. 40.

‡ Matt. vi. 30.

must obey, if we would attain to the end of our calling. When its regards are thus directed to the means of deliverance actually put in operation, more especially to the wonderful discovery of the atonement by the death of the Son of God ; we have, as it were, the most satisfying pledge, for the fulfilment of all those gracious promises, which have been delivered to us in the Gospel ; a warrant for the most complete security, in committing ourselves to the guidance of God, who hath so proved to us, that the resources of Almighty Power, and Infinite Wisdom, in all their plenitude, are, actually, at the disposal of Mercy and Goodness as unbounded. This satisfying pledge, and astonishing instrument of the Divine mercy towards us, is therefore peculiarly the object of faith ; and to this, it is particularly directed, throughout the Sacred Writings ; by expressions such as the following : “ faith in Christ ^a ;” “ through faith in his blood ^b.” Faith, therefore, in Christ, is the surrender of the soul to his guidance, and as the prince of life, and captain of salvation.

Further: as the objects to which the eye of Faith is prospectively directed, are not, so much, the circumstances of external condition, as the enjoyment of the favour of God, by a spiritual union of the soul with Him, in its views, desires, and affections ; and since He, to whose favour we

^a Acts xxiv. 24.

^b Rom. iii. 25.

aspire, is, also, the Great Being on whose help we depend, for the success of our endeavours ; it is plain that there is such an intimate connexion, among the several significations of the term, Faith, that for any practical purpose, it is unnecessary to distinguish them. He who looks to the favour of God, as the end of his views and his efforts, cannot fail of committing himself to His support and guidance. His faith, if strong, cannot be barren, it cannot rest in mere admissions of the judgment, but will pervade his entire character, consisting of views, dispositions, and affections. Faith, which looks not only to the things promised, but also to the means provided for their attainment, must generate hope : and both must necessarily kindle the flame of love towards God ; which is the spirit of filial obedience.

Wonderful indeed is the alliance among the host of Christian virtues ; nor is there any one among them, to which we may attain, without a corresponding proficiency in the rest. The same had been observed, of those virtues, which heathen philosophy had derived, from the chaotic constitution of human nature, replete with jarring elements and conflicting principles : but how much more intimate is the alliance, between those, which being emanations from the Spirit of God, are the reflections of the Divine nature in the soul of man ?

This connexion might seem to be sufficiently

made out, by shewing that all other virtues spring from faith, as from a common root—that they are but the different branches of one and the same parent stock. But this is not all : there is among them, a mutual influence and reaction, which indicates an organization still more perfect, and a union yet more vital. From faith proceed hope and charity; let us consider their invigorating influence on the principle from which they emanate.

And first; with respect to hope :—This virtue is a modification of faith, when the object of this latter is a thing desired. To constitute hope, we must believe in the truth of God's promises and desire their fulfilment. Hope is anticipated enjoyment, and this, in general, constitutes the greater part of the happiness attainable in the present life. The brightness of the prospects we discern through its vistas, diverts our thoughts from the dreariness of the waste through which we travel : to these we turn our eyes, from the gloom of adversity; and frequently apply to them for consolation, even contrary to all rational expectation. Blessed are we, if the objects by which our hopes are engaged, are those, whose brightness faith has already discerned, and whose reality, it has acknowledged.

But hope, which delights itself with the prospects presented by faith, is not backward in making a suitable return : this is easily appre-

hended ; for nothing engages the imagination so forcibly, as that which has already engaged our desires. But from the moment that a thing appears to be desirable, it excites the various faculties of the mind, and engrosses the powers it has excited ; and by directing the course of our thoughts and actions, it establishes a channel both wide and deep, in which they shall continue to flow, without difficulty or obstruction. Accordingly ; if the objects proposed for our attainment, are not only those whose reality we admit, but whose enjoyment we long for ; without doubt, they shall become the constant food of our contemplations. Indeed, so requisite is this engagement of the affections, to the excitement of our thoughts, that the dominion of faith is never completed or confirmed, without the co-operation of hope, its natural ally. For if the objects set before us, are not those we desire ; however we may be assured of their reality and importance, they readily give place to others, in which, we feel more interested.

But faith and hope, to accomplish the work of renovation, must engender the love of God. Faith, indeed, furnishes the light, by which our course should be directed ; and hope is the stimulant, which animates us in our progress : but unless these principles terminate in confidence and love towards God, they are destitute of the spirit by which they should be enlivened. But it is easily

perceived, that this is their natural termination ; even those fellow-creatures, of whose good will we are assured, and in whose sincerity we confide, are naturally regarded with complacency. Kindness and confidence are excited, by the manifestation of the qualities of benevolence and truth, and the regards which may have been more or less interested in the beginning, grow up into personal friendships ; our affections ultimately resting on the authors or the partners of our satisfactions, independently of the selfish considerations, by which, we had been at first attracted.

This may afford us some idea of the progress of the love of God in the soul of man ; for the superiority of the exciting cause, though infinite, affects only the purity or strength of the affection, not its origin or its growth. Human nature is consistent, and its processes are the same, whether the object which engages its affections be divine or human. Accordingly, when our faith has attained to a lively apprehension of the attributes of God ; when it is fully impressed with the infinite extent of his power, and the infinite resources of his wisdom ; when it beholds these attributes under the direction of infinite love, exerted in the provisions of Providence, and the deep-laid plans of Redemption, by which we are not only to be rescued from the dominion and the consequences of sin, but to be exalted to never-ending glory, in a more intimate communication with

Him who is, Himself, the source of light, and life, and strength; is it too much to assert, that it must necessarily excite our affections, and turn them towards that Being, in whom these attractions are thus united, in a stream the purest, the richest, the fullest, and strongest, that can possibly spring out of the heart of man? And is it to be supposed that having been thus directed to Him whose essence is love, they shall not return purified and enriched, to diffuse over His creation the blessings of peace and active benevolence?

And can it be imagined that Christian charity makes no return to that faith and hope, from which it emanates? That this which is the foretaste of heavenly bliss, shall not quicken our perceptions of the objects of faith, establish our hopes, and render all our sensibilities more keen and exquisite?—that it shall not impart to us the strength which is to support us in all trials, and encourage us in all exertions? O yes, my friends, to a mind so animated, the difficulties by which it is beset, are as nothing: “perfect love casteth out fear^c”; and this it does, by giving to our faith, the strength of immediate perception, and to our hopes, the reality of present possession. Such is the mutual influence, which is intimated by the Apostle, when he derives each of these principles indiscriminately from the other; as in the

^c 1 John iv, 18.

prayer which he offers up for the brethren, "that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith, that being rooted and grounded in love, they may be able to comprehend with all Saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge^d." Such is that victorious faith which overcometh the world, that "faith which worketh by love^e."

From what has been said, it is not to be inferred, that the circumstances of our condition in the life to come, can be distinctly apprehended by any powers of perception we now possess, or can here attain to. The observation of the Apostle encourages no such persuasion: "it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is^f."

And St. Paul, to whom these things had been especially revealed, declares, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him^g."

Now some may find it difficult to conceive, how the mind can possibly be engaged by objects, to which its powers are confessedly inadequate. But this distinct apprehension of the particular cir-

^d Ephes. iii. 19.

^e Gal. v. 6.

^f 1 John iii. 2.

^g 1 Cor. ii. 9.

cumstances of our future condition, is not required, either for the existence or confirmation of faith. The superiority of the pleasures of the understanding over those of sense, and of the affections over both, is, I presume, easily apprehended, and readily admitted. We know in general what is contentment, peace, joy, and the aggregate of these, which is happiness; though we should not distinctly discern, the particular objects, which are to afford us these satisfactions: we may know and feel what is security, though we may not see, particularly, the means by which danger is averted. And in general: the nature and character of our future condition may be apprehended, without a distinct perception of the particular means, by which this condition is to be supported.

And is not this a new occasion of gratitude to Him who hath so ordered it? For if such things were offered to the imagination, they would, probably, engross the powers of our minds, and thereby convert our religion into a mere calculating and interested policy; differing from that of the worldling, whose desires are limited to this earth, merely in the range of our views. Instead of this, the object pre-eminently offered to our faith, our hope and trust, is that which is also to become the object of our affections. To our minds, the Supreme Being has offered himself as

this object. Our affiliation, is the great end of our hopes ; His truth, the firmest ground of our confidence.

Nor is hope without many points of rest in the journey that lies before us. The vicissitudes of human life, become the objects of religious hope, when we discern in them, as undoubtedly we always may, the evidences of the provident care of God ; the marks of his love ; and the means of spiritual advancement. But above all, in the wondrous scheme of Redemption, the attributes of the Deity are exhibited to us, in a manner, calculated to fill the human soul in all its capacities of perception and feeling ; and being furnished with so many sensible characters of his existence, of his nature, of his power, his wisdom, his inexhaustible goodness, and his ineffable glory, can it be asserted, that we have no distinct or tangible object, towards which our faith is directed ; no solid ground on which it may be supported ? Let the Christian answer this question. He is required only to look within himself, for the satisfaction arising out of these hopes and contemplations ; to call to mind the impressions, which in his more happy moments, he may have received from awakening discourses, or providential occurrences yet more awakening. If his mind has been ever raised above the inquietudes of the present life, in the anticipation of

the serenity and peace, by which they should be succeeded ; if the blessedness of that state, its security and endless duration ; if the exaltation, not of his condition only, but of his very being, consisting in the closer communication with the fountain of light and life, and the enjoyment of the unobstructed outflowings of the Divine love ; if the wisdom of God, in providing the means by which these blessings are rendered attainable, and his goodness in offering them to our acceptance, have been represented to him, in a manner, calculated to inspire sentiments of wonder, and of love, of reliance, and of gratitude ; if compared with these things, the interests of the present life, have appeared to him, vain, fugitive, and unsatisfying, unworthy to become the end of his hopes, or the scope of his endeavours ; if he has ever been enlightened by views such as these, let him endeavour to recal them, such as he had entertained them, before their brightness had been again obscured by his worldly engagements ; and finally, let him suppose this to be the permanent condition of his mind ; and he will not be without some notion of that faith, by which we are to become living members of the Church of Christ.

Undoubtedly all these things cannot be embraced at once ; and much less can they be constantly contemplated, by the limited powers of

the human mind : neither have we insisted on the absolute necessity of this.

The principles of conduct, are of a nature calculated to preserve us from falling under the dominion of sin, even should we, occasionally, lose sight of the considerations by which they are recommended and supported. The principles of veracity and justice, and the dictates of Christian charity, if duly established, cannot be violated without some unpleasant notices addressed to the conscience. It is the same with every rule of conduct which has been properly impressed : indeed it is included, in the very notion of a rule, that it will serve for our direction, without a constant recurrence to the considerations, by which it is recommended or enforced ; without this, a rule of conduct is inconceivable : yet still, it must be contended, that the efficient motives of conduct, cannot be long overlooked without imminent danger ; inasmuch as the difficulty of recalling them, encreases by neglect, whilst those of an opposite character gather strength. But this is a danger which we shall not incur, if the will of God becomes, as it should, the animating principle of the thoughts and movements ; according to the apostle, who directs us, that in all things, whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we should do all to the glory of God^t. And surely, it is no impediment in the conduct of our worldly af-

^t 1 Cor. x. 31.

fairs, that we regard them in the light of religious duties.

Hitherto, we have considered the nature of that living faith, which is the condition or the qualification, to which the promises of the Gospel are annexed. But there is also a spurious faith, to which it is highly important to direct your attention.

Fanaticism, which is a spiritual madness, combines in the most monstrous association, faith in God, with passions the most odious and destructive : it can delude itself by believing that it is labouring in the service of the Almighty, whilst it indulges the corruptest propensities of human nature ; and excite them to the most infernal atrocities, by the very motives whereby they should be counteracted or subdued.

This disease is sometimes epidemic ; and history, especially that of these countries, has exhibited it, in characters so fearful, that it is not likely again to prevail to the same extent.

It is otherwise with superstition, the faith of a timid and darkened mind ; which, as if distrusting the efficacy of what Christ hath done, and the sufficiency of what he hath taught and commanded ; seeks for safety in other securities, besides those which he hath provided, and in other observances, besides those he hath enjoined.

It is not necessary that I should point out instances of this corruption : it will ever prevail,

where there is an artful priesthood and an ignorant people.

Enthusiasm is that perverted faith, which, not content with repressing the arrogance of reason, will glory in its subversion. Having rejected this guide, the enthusiast is prone to mistake the suggestions of his own overheated fancy, for the revelations of the Divine will ; or to neglect those concerns, by which, it is ordained, that the well-being, not only of the individual himself, but of society, should be upheld and promoted: not considering that our natural reason, is the gift of God ; that faith, whilst it extends our views beyond the scope of reason, is yet supported by its sanctions, and strengthened by its researches ; and that under the direction of genuine faith, our temporal concerns, furnish the subjects of our religious duties.

Many and fearful are the examples, in all ages of the Church, of these perversions.

But there is a mistaken faith, against which it is still more necessary we should be on our guard, as being more favourable to our natural propensities.

I mean that abortive faith, already spoken of, which, resting on a mere recognition of the truth of God's word, and the reality and tremendous importance of the interests of which it treats, leaves the powers of our minds, to be engaged by

other objects ; and the course of our actions to be directed by other principles.

Even in the writings of the Apostles themselves, we find the term, sometimes extended to a mere recognition of the truth of the Gospel.

In this way St. James, in the texts so frequently commented on, speaks of a faith which has no influence in the formation of the character, or the direction of the conduct.

But by adverting to the opinions which the Apostle condemns, it will appear how it comes to be so applied by him : and by considering the lesson he inculcates, it will be evident, that the passages in question, make no change in the delineation or colouring, by which *saving* faith is represented in every part of Scripture.

For it appears, from the remonstrance of the Apostle, that there were many then, as there are now, who professing to acknowledge that Christ had suffered for the redemption of man, and giving to this conviction the name of faith, presumptuously applied to themselves, the promises made by Christ, to those, who being his disciples indeed, had their conversation in heaven. Now the object of the Apostle, in the places alluded to, is to shew, that a mere conviction of the judgment, is no foundation of hope : and not content with recording his protest, against the opinions of those, who found it convenient to favor the notion of its sufficiency ; he labours by every method of

illustration and of argument, to impress the truth, on the minds of those, who might be disposed to yield to the delusion. Accordingly; these places of Scripture, far from affording a view of saving faith, different from that in which we have endeavoured to represent it, would seem to be providentially intended, to guard against the fatal error, of ascribing its transforming power, to any different quality designated by the same appellation.

It was indeed possible for the Apostle, to have disabused such persons, by refusing to give the name of faith, to a mere conviction of the truth of the Gospel, or an assent to the things therein proposed for our belief: but he found the term applied in this sense, by the persons whom he addresses; and his concern was not with names, but with things: his object was, not to direct the modes of speaking in every or in any tongue, but, amid all the fluctuations of language, to guard the great truths of the Gospel from unintentional perversion. Instead therefore of declaring, that a mere assent to the truth of Holy Writ, does not amount to Christian faith, he chooses rather to say, that such an assent, by whatever name it might be designated, is not effectual to salvation.

Therefore, if any have deceived themselves in this matter, they are without excuse; but if aware of the nature of vital faith, they feel not

its influence, in the habitual direction of their thoughts towards God and Eternity, their knowledge of the truth, can only serve to shew them the Glory, which they knowingly forfeit, the Perdition, which they may so justly apprehend.

DISCOURSE II.

ON THE WANT OF FAITH.

JOHN iii. 19.

This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

IN the passage preceding these remarkable words, our Lord having pronounced the condemnation of the rebellious spirit which refuses to profit by the means of salvation, which God, in the plenitude of his mercy, hath provided for his fallen creatures; proceeds in the text, to support the justice of that awful sentence, by pointing out the principle and the cause of this disaffection. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." And to impress more deeply this fearfully interesting truth, he adds, "every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved."

Nothing can be more decisive, than the decla-

ration contained in these few words, respecting that alienation of mind, which refuses to acknowledge the truth of the Gospel, or acknowledging it, declines the invitation to draw near to its light, to imbibe its instructions, and submit to its guidance: and nothing can be better calculated to confound the unbelieving, or half-believing sinner; to deprive him of his pretences and excuses; to divest him of his false security; and to awaken him to a sense of his dreadful responsibility. Here he will perceive, that infidelity is distinctly referred to the corruption of the moral habits, alienating the affections and darkening the understanding; whereby it becomes, not merely an error of judgment, but a perversion of the will; not only a misfortune, but a crime; or rather the seal of all those iniquities, which stand between him and salvation.

But the individuals who fall under the condemnation pronounced in the text, may be referred, as already intimated, to two separate classes; and as their cases are somewhat different, it may be proper to notice them distinctly.

Some, there are, who professing to regard the Gospel as the vehicle of light from above; a light which manifests to the view of mortal man, both the counsels of God with respect to him, and the paths of duty by which he is to attain to the purposes of his high destination; nevertheless refuse to draw near, and avail themselves of that light,

for the due apprehension of their interests, or of the means by which they are secured.

In the case here supposed, which is that of a large portion of professing Christians, the existence of a supernatural revelation is not called in question: nay the expression of any doubt on the subject, may be heard with horror, and answered with indignation. The sanctity of character, with which an established religion is invested, will, in most cases, ensure for it this general acknowledgment: but a nearer approach to the light of the Gospel, would shew to such professors, the utter insufficiency of this recognition. It would discover to them the iniquity of the course which they will not abandon, and the vileness of the condition from which they will not arise, and they instinctively recoil, from the horrors of distraction, and the anguish of self-condemnation.

Let not such deceive themselves; for as theirs is not that shield of faith, whereby they shall be enabled to quench the fiery darts of the wicked, so they may be assured that it is not from the armoury of God.

The faith, which is profitable to salvation, is of a character widely different. It is not that distant and indistinct perception which is compatible with indecision; but such a spiritual approximation, as may be requisite to give to the matters presented, that tremendous reality and

paramount importance, whereby they may fill the capacities of the mind, engage the affections, fix the resolutions, redeem us from the power of sin, and bear us triumphant, in spite of all the solicitations of the passing scene of our existence.

Nothing short of this, can effect our spiritual renovation : Nothing short of this, will deliver us from the condemnation of Him, who, having furnished all that could be requisite for our conviction, charges the deficiencies of our faith, on the alienating corruptions of the heart.

The other class, to whom the denunciations of the text may be supposed to be directed, consists of the avowed infidels, who with more daring presumption, though with better claims to consistency, deny the Divine authority of the Holy Scriptures.

At present, I have no concern with the arguments by which that authority is impugned ; but it may not be amiss to consider the grounds, on which, exemption is claimed, from that responsibility, which the word of God attaches, to every species of opposition to its influence and design.

Seeming to have no apprehension, of the intimate connexion, between the dispositions and the intellectual powers of man ; the Infidel professes to discern, in faith, nothing but a conviction of the understanding, commensurate to the evidence laid before him. It seems to him, accordingly, that whatever comes to him, marked with the

characters of truth, he cannot avoid believing; and that whatever is impressed with the opposite characters, he cannot avoid rejecting: and that as his belief is not more at his own disposal, not more an act of the will than knowledge itself; it is not a fitter subject of exhortation or of admonition, of reward, or of punishment.

Now before that I proceed to shew, that this representation, is as much opposed by the constitution of human nature, as it is by the word of God; I would beg leave to observe, that the very desire to vindicate the moral character, on the score of the matters which he professes to believe, implies, at least, some misgiving as to the truth of those opinions. It is neither natural nor necessary for a man to defend himself, against the charge of maintaining what he has embraced with an assurance of its truth: so that the very attempt at vindication, betrays, at least, the suspicion that he may have been concerned with falsehood; a suspicion, perhaps stronger than he might find it convenient to admit.

But, let us suppose, that his convictions are fairly represented: is it certain, that no responsibility can be attached to these convictions? This is the question with which we are here concerned. Adopting, therefore, the parallel between opinion and knowledge so much relied on; and admitting, for the sake of argument, that the comparison is just in all its points; yet until it can be shewn,

that the will has nothing to do, in the investigation of truth, or the entertainment of it when discovered, the comparison will not avail the enemies of revelation.

But who will be so hardy as to maintain, that in the investigation or entertainment of truth, we are not liable to be affected by any extraneous influence? And that our knowledge, with respect both to its extent and intimacy, is necessarily commensurate to our means and opportunities? Nay, in the pursuit of intellectual truth, abstracted, as much as it is conceivable, from the more agitating concerns of human life; who will maintain that our success, is never influenced, by our tastes, or habits, or that self-possession and self-command, by which the measure of our exertions is for the most part determined; or by the progress we may have already made, in the acquisition of knowledge, or the cultivation of talent? And if the influence of our tastes, our habits, our dispositions, and prejudices, can scarcely be excluded from enquiries, which should terminate in scientific knowledge, how much greater scope is afforded for their exercise, in concerns, wherein we are to be directed by the appearances of probability; where the comparisons to be instituted, are so much more extended, the proofs so much more numerous and diversified, and their seeming value, so much affected, by the circumstances of novelty or familiarity, or the

manner in which they connect themselves with former impressions ?

Indeed, such is the variety, not only, of the considerations by which probabilities are to be determined, but of the degrees of force with which they offer themselves to different minds, that he must be deemed very ignorant of the nature of man, who is so sanguine, as to expect any thing approaching to unanimity, in such matters.

But it is not requisite that we should account for this diversity of sentiment : the thing itself is matter of observation ; and experience, which renders it notorious, establishes, at least, this truth, that our assent, even in matters as far as possible removed from our personal interests, is not regulated, exclusively, by the circumstances of the case, which falls under the review of the judgment.

In addition to this : let it be supposed that the subject under consideration, has any visible relation to the objects by which we have been attracted, the motives by which we have been influenced, or the principles by which we have been guided ; that it relates to the mortification or indulgence of predominant passions, of confirmed propensities, or of ruling appetites—to any change in our views, our affections, our habits, or our pursuits ; and we cannot be at a loss to conceive, how forcibly the enquiry is affected, by circumstances totally foreign from the merits of the question to be decided ; whe-

ther we regard the impartiality with which it is conducted, the activity with which it is prosecuted, or the success with which it is rewarded.

We know that when belief is combined with desire, it becomes hope: that when united to aversion, the result is fear: and is it to be supposed, that the elements of this amalgamation, do not act on each other? When we consider, how men contrive to cheat themselves into a feeling of happiness or misery, and that the visions which either brighten or darken the paths of human life, are, few of them, any thing more than the creations of a self-deluding fancy, with which the minds delights or distresses itself; the position will scarcely be deemed unwarrantable, that we are, most of us, naturally inclined, according to our particular temperament, to listen, either to the pleasing invitations of hope, or to the distressing suggestions of fear. In other words, that our judgments are biassed by our desires and aversions.

All these observations, relative to the influence of personal character on the decisions of the understanding, apply with accumulated force, when the subject under consideration is the Christian revelation, which assumes no less than the direction of our inclinations and conduct, the formation of our habits and characters, the regulation of our principles, and the renovation of our affections. By claims such as these, the prejudices are most forcibly excited, and in deciding

upon these claims, there is also the widest scope for their influence.

The evidences, even such as are written in the broadest characters, suggest many topics of enquiry, concerning the facts related, the witnesses by whom they are attested, and the writers by whom they are recorded. Now it is apparent that truths which are thus supported, must offer themselves in various measures to different minds, according to the direction of their enquiries, the activity with which they are prosecuted, and the erudition with which they are conducted; and that where the satisfaction, which some may think fit to require, is to be derived from sources so multifarious, he that is indisposed to the reception of truth, will not want for excuses to justify his incredulity.

The internal characters of truth are to be perceived only on a nearer approach to Christianity. Such are to be discovered, in the adaptation of means to the work to be accomplished. This work, is the change to be wrought in the spiritual constitution of our nature. Now, for the due apprehension of such characters, it is absolutely requisite, that we first admit the truth, and feel the force of those representations, which are made to us, relative to the present condition of human nature, and the necessity of the change required; and he who goes thus far, is no longer an infidel.

Yet after this nearer approach to Christianity,

the appearance of these internal characters of truth must vary, according to the qualifications of the enquirer, his tastes, his habits, his moral temperament, and all the features of his mental and spiritual character.

The perception of the adaptation of means to ends, is affected by all these circumstances. Accordingly, the apprehensions of this kind, are so subtle, so delicate, and so difficult to trace to their elementary principles, that they are commonly spoken of as belonging to a peculiar and original faculty.

Such is the perception of beauty in the works of nature or art; or of that, which in human conduct, we designate by the appellations of moral fitness, propriety, or truth. Now with respect to these apprehensions, feelings, and sensibilities; the diversity, even among those who are furnished with the same opportunities of information, and subjected to the same course of discipline and instruction, is such, as could scarcely be anticipated in beings of the same species.

Yet these are the faculties by which the internal evidences are apprehended,—faculties which, as applied to these subjects, correspond to the state, to which we have been already advanced, by the light and power of the Gospel. As we proceed onwards from strength to strength, the internal characters of truth, which belong to the Christian dispensation, increase in number and brightness; until the result is that overpowering

conviction, which the Apostle himself was unable to express, but in the language of admiration. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God *!"

Moreover, in considering the influence of moral character on our religious persuasions, it should never be forgotten, that faith is not simply an admission of the certainty of a Divine revelation; but the entertainment afforded to the matters therein proposed to us, the revelation itself being previously acknowledged. Now, we are all aware of the sympathy, which exists, between the faculties and sensibilities of human nature: that as it is impossible to disengage the thoughts, from those objects which have already engaged our affections, so it is also impossible to preserve them in a course into which they have not been directed by our desires. Our Lord himself has frequently insisted on this truth. It is that which is contained in the text. It is that also which is conveyed to us in the declaration, that where our treasure is, there shall our hearts be also ^b.

Now if this be admitted, viz. that the occupation of the mind implies, as its condition, the possession of the heart; it follows, that Christian faith, depends, not more on the evidences addressed to it, than on the moral sensibilities by which they are to be apprehended, and the moral dispositions by which they are to be treasured.

^a Rom. xi. 33.

^b Matt. vi. 21.

And we may therefore proceed in the prosecution of our design, to consider what there is in the constitution, the condition, or the habitual pursuits of mankind, adverse to the apprehension or entertainment of the truths revealed in Scripture.

Turning, therefore, to the rudiments of nature, common to the whole of the human race, it will be perceived that the mind, lodged within its dwelling of flesh, betrays, at first, little or no appearance of those active powers, which, when subsequently developed, constitute the distinguishing glories of the species.

In this first stage of our being, the very existence of the mind is manifested to others, only by its capacity for receiving impressions from material objects: and it seems as if it were, itself, stimulated into a consciousness of that existence, only by those pains and pleasures, which indicate the wants of the body. It is by the demands of the body, that the active powers of the mind are first awakened; it is in the service of the body, they are afterwards exercised and invigorated. Even when the energies of the mind are fully expanded, it would seem to be no nearer to the end of its Egyptian bondage; its exertions are still directed by the same task-master. Its ingenuity and invention are exercised, on matters connected with sensual indulgence. On these, it displays the refinement of its taste; among these, it selects the subjects of its contemplations, and

the food of its fancy. Like the vapour which broods upon the surface of the marsh, the spirit of man retains and exhibits the qualities of the inert material, from which it was extracted ; and it is not until expanded, and sublimed by a superior and more quickening influence, that it displays any of those characters of brightness, which indicate its higher destination.

But how much reason is there to apprehend, that the mind of man, at first, of necessity confined to material objects, should never rise within the reach of higher attractions ? that the desires excited by objects connected with his temporary accommodations, should swell beyond the measure of his necessities ; that the projects of worldly advancement, with all their attendant difficulties and dangers to be surmounted and averted, the rivalships to be encountered, the friendships to be conciliated, the anxieties of hope and fear by which he is constantly agitated, the long continued attention and vigorous exertion, requisite to ensure success, in those occupations, by which he satisfies the wants of society, whilst he labours to provide for his own ; that all these things should take possession of his mind, its powers, its capacities, and its affections, so as to leave him neither the leisure, nor the inclination, nor the ability, to apply himself to things of a spiritual nature, such as his imagination cannot delineate, nor his fancy combine into any tangible representation ?

The character of sluggish insensibility to spiritual concerns, as drawn by our Saviour himself, is that of the carnal mind of man; "they seeing, see not, and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand^c." His thoughts are arrested by the exterior appearances offered to his senses; his apprehension of greatness is limited to its pageantry; and his sense of religious duty, to ritual observances. There is in him no discernment of the Majesty of that Power by which he is environed; of that Providence by which he is sustained; of the Holiness of that Spirit by which he should be purified; or of the wonderful extent of that Wisdom and that Goodness which have been exerted for his salvation.

Such is the character of man's natural perceptions, to which that of his affections, as given by the Apostle, is perfectly consonant, when he tells us that "all that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life^d;" that these are the elements, of which the natural desires of man's heart are but the different modifications.

How different from these are the contemplations of faith, and the affections thereby engendered! Among the objects by which we are encompassed, and the occupations by which we are engaged, it beholds nothing on which to repose; it discerns in them, nothing, but the indications of

^c Mat. xiii. 13.

^d 1 John ii. 16.

that Supreme Being whom the Gospel hath declared to us; the operations of his irresistible power, his all-disposing wisdom and inexhaustible goodness. To the eye of faith, this alone is real, durable, and substantial: The things of sense are delusive, transient, and visionary.

It is by the light which shines around the throne of God, that man is enabled to discern and appreciate his own nature and condition. The unsullied purity of God, apprehended by the eye of faith, is that light by which he is enabled to look even into the depths of perdition. It is this which manifests the deformity of sin, and the entire alienation of his own corrupted nature. It is the contemplation of this transcendent Greatness, on the one hand, and of this unworthiness on the other, that enables him to apprehend the amazing condescension of that Being, who hath stooped from such a height of glory, for the purpose of drawing him out of darkness and spiritual death, to an intimate communication with the fountain of light and life; or as it is significantly denominated, the immediate presence of God. It is the consideration of this deliverance, and this mercy so manifested to the eye of faith, that having expanded the capacities of the soul of man with wonder, sends in a tide of Divine love, overflowing in all his actions, and bearing him along, in spite of every opposing attraction, belonging to

the things which this world promises to his exertions, or offers to his enjoyment.

If this be a true representation of man as he is by nature and by faith, how wide is the disparity between the two conditions, and how difficult the transition from the one to the other !

If the difference consisted, merely, in the extreme diversity of the subjects which are offered to his contemplations, still the chasm by which these two conditions are separated would seem impassable; but when it is considered, that the things with which he is to become conversant, are not merely subjects offered for the entertainment of his thoughts, but motives for his excitement, and lights for his direction : that the operation of faith, is not, merely, to elevate his mind beyond the things of the passing scene ; but to disengage his affections, from those which had been the food of his appetites, and the ailment of his nature ; and to direct his course towards the concerns of another life ; can we be at a loss, concerning the quality of those hindrances, by which its visions are obstructed, and its growth is impeded ? or is it difficult to conceive, that the principle, which alone is effectual to break the bonds, and overthrow the dominion of Satan, should be resisted by that power, it would bring into captivity ?

From these suggestions it might seem to be inferred, that the distinction between believers and unbelievers, should be strongly marked in their

moral characters and pursuits : and so it is, whenever the professions correspond with the internal persuasions ; and so it was marked, in the early ages of Christianity ; before that by its complete establishment, people of all characters were collected within its pale.

At the first preaching of the Gospel, it must have been a strong persuasion, which could induce a man, to change the forms and habits, in which he had been educated ; or to encounter the host of prejudices and difficulties, by which, on the rejection of the popular belief, he must expect to be beset : and therefore we find, that little is said, of the weakness or insufficiency of the faith of any of the early converts. In them, it must necessarily have been strong and effectual ; inasmuch as a languid assent, could not have brought them over, to a direct recognition and open profession of the truth of the Gospel.

But with the members of a Christian community, long established and widely extended, the case is different. In these, the convictions may be weak, because never deeply impressed ; and many grow up, in a mere passive acquiescence in tenets, which they scarcely take the trouble to understand, much less to apprehend forcibly, or feel influentially ; and they may suppose that they believe, only because they never have been at the pains of enquiring.

Accordingly, we find in that part of the New

Testament, which was written, after that Christianity had been, in certain places, for some time, established, characters of this sort are noted. Thus, St. John is commanded to write to the Angel or Bishop of the Church of Sardis, "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead *." And to the Angel of the Church of Laodicea, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot : I would that thou wert cold or hot ; so because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth f."

It may be presumed, that in this condition, men are not always sensible of their deficiency. The laws of a Christian society, by which their worldly desires are regulated, but not subdued, are in general, sufficient to direct them, into a course consistent with the temporal welfare of themselves and others ; and, therefore, not openly at variance, with the prohibitory laws of God. When men err not materially from this course, they deem that his commands are obeyed, and his Will satisfied : and if their habits are marked by decorum and temperance, and their dealings by a regard to the rights and the feelings of others ; inasmuch as all this is consonant to the laws of the Supreme Ruler of the world, they are not prone to suspect that any thing is amiss. The motive of action not being so easily detected, they

* Rev. iii. 1. f Rev. iii. 15, 16.

congratulate themselves on this supposed conformity to the will of Heaven, and speak peace where there is no peace.

Such a one feels no scruple in professing himself a Christian : he is not sensible of any hostility to the faith, not being made sensible of its opposition to himself, to his views, his motives, his principles and affections ; and he can hear the preacher discourse " concerning righteousness and temperance, and judgment to come," without any of those perturbations ascribed to Felix.

But if in the eagerness of his natural desires, he passes those limits, and that the laws of God are violated, by the commission of any of those enormities, against which, the wrath of Heaven is plainly and emphatically denounced ; how shall the power of self-deception now secure him, from the humiliation, and the torment of self-condemnation ?

The resources of self-delusion would seem here to be exhausted ; but it is otherwise : for he attempts to answer the upbraidings of a wounded conscience, by resolutions of future amendment : and in the first beginnings of a course of iniquity, the attempt, gross as it may appear, is seldom made in vain.

He succeeds, indeed, in composing a troubled conscience by this self-deluding artifice : he wel-

* Acts xxiv. 25.

comes the opiate, which, whilst it allays his present sufferings, impairs the vitality which would have obstructed the progress of the disorder; the dominion of sin increases with indulgence, his habits become more inveterate, and his condition more hopeless.

When the sinner is too far advanced, and too much confirmed in habitual wickedness; when, by the repetition of his offences, the fond deceit has been too often detected and exposed, any longer to retain its wonted power over the judgment; where is then his resource? Christianity, that dispensation of Divine mercy, presents nothing but vexatious restrictions and dreadful denunciations. Its very holiness is armed with torments and with terror, adding poignancy to the reproofs of conscience, and dashing his prospects with despair.

How delighted would he be, to escape from a burthen which oppresses his imagination; to be assured that the spectre with which he had been scared was a mere delusion; that his apprehensions are unfounded, and that his account with the Almighty, is closed eternally by the hand of death! Knowing himself to be an alien from the dominion of the Gospel, he becomes an enemy to its authority: and is it from such a one that we can expect the decisions of an impartial and unprejudiced judgment?

When he, whose course of life is at variance

with the suggestions of his conscience, will not consent to ease the torments which are inseparable from such a state, by the adoption of a course conformable to the will of God, as it is revealed to him in his word; have we not reason to apprehend that, at least, by him of bolder temperament, conscience and principle will be forced into a correspondence with practice? That to escape from this distraction, which human nature cannot long support, the very foundations of religious faith shall be abandoned?

In this stage of his defection, the mental process is simple and obvious: all that appears favorable to his wishes, presents itself at once, and prominently before his view; whilst every thing of an opposite character, retires into the shade. When he cannot shut his eyes against the evidences laid before him, he tries, by every artifice, to evade their force: he will persuade himself that the proofs are not so far conclusive, as to exclude all doubt whatsoever: that these things may possibly be misrepresented; or if true, that they may be accounted for, in some way, which he does not distinctly apprehend, and which he does not feel himself called on, distinctly to describe. The more of doubt which the sinner can throw on the evidences of Christianity, the more he feels himself at ease in the violation of its dictates. From doubt, the step is easy to rejection; or at least, to the inference which is

the same in practice ; that the considerations which Christianity proposes, relating to things distant, imperceptible, and uncertain, should not be weighed against those which are felt to be solid, and present, and palpable ; such as the pleasures and interests of the scene before him. These impressions will be afterwards retraced with less difficulty, whilst the perversion of mind by which they had been introduced, is less and less suspected. The current of his thoughts breaking down the impediments by which it had been checked, or turning aside from these obstructions, now runs on smoothly in the same channels ; and the facility, which is the work of habit, is ascribed to the indisputable authority of reason, and the irresistible force of conviction.

Were he released from the bondage of those sins which Christianity proscribes ; how would he desire to perceive satisfactory evidence of the truth of that system, whose privileges are so exalted, and whose promises so transporting ; And how soon would his desires be satisfied !

In the blessings it bestows during the present life, he could not fail to recognize, at least, some indications of those to which it conducts us in the next : Some pledge, that its promises are not delusive ; that the hopes it inspires, are not visionary. When he adverts to the peace which it sends on earth ; the amiable affections with which it unites the members of society ; the authority with which

it regulates or subdues the selfish affections ; the happiness it pours into the hearts of individuals ; the support it furnishes, under inevitable misfortune ; the magnanimity it inspires ; the virtues with which it ennobles the human character : as he turns to these, and other fruits of Christianity, which are such, as human philosophy never produced, he would not fail to acknowledge, that the system from whence they flow in such profusion, cannot be founded in error ; and that the great God, whose distinguishing attributes are mercy and truth, would never have employed a system of delusion, as the means of conveying to us his choicest blessings.

I am aware, that those who have looked at Christianity with an unfavorable eye, are not always remarkable for gross immorality or flagrant wickedness : that among the ranks of its enemies, there are not wanting, men, not only of penetrating judgment and extensive views, but of amiable manners, sober habits, and benevolent dispositions. I am aware of this ; and accordingly, that in this account of the impediments which bar the admission of the Gospel, I have subjected myself to the charge of professional, perhaps, of illiberal prejudices.

It is true, my friends ; that among the ruling motives and principles, which in their combinations, constitute the endless varieties of human character ; that which bars up the avenues of

the heart, against the admission of the Gospel, is not always the same ; and in the instances that come before us, it is not always easy to divine, (even on a closer inspection of individual character) which of these carnal affections, is most active. It is not always possible to observe which of the hellish brood it is, whose voice we hear in those words, " What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth ; art thou come hither to destroy us ? "

The application of general principles to particular cases, is often matter of difficulty ; nevertheless, the more general consideration of the subject before us, may not be unprofitable. It must be satisfactory to learn, that reason and observation do not refuse their humble support to the declarations of the Word of God, which charges all hostility to its authority, on the corruption of the human heart ; and on its natural aversion to those spiritualizing influences, which would change the entire nature of its principles and affections.

But perhaps even this more general statement, without derogating from its truth, may admit of limitations and exceptions. The opportunities of information are dealt out in various measures, and much depends on the manner, in which, not merely the evidences, but the essential truths of the Gospel may have been presented.

In the manifestation of this opposition also,

much will depend on constitutional boldness or timidity. The suspicions which are so natural to dispositions at variance with the spirit of the Gospel, will be avowed and defended by some, whilst they are suppressed or disowned by others.

In the hands of God are the hearts of all men ; and it is not for us to pronounce on the measure of delinquency which he may charge on any of his creatures.

Let us learn to keep our own hearts with all diligence, entreating the Lord, with the Psalmist, that he would prove us and examine the ground of our hearts, that he would see well if there is in us any way of wickedness, and that he would lead us in the way everlasting.

DISCOURSE III.

ON SPIRITUAL INFLUENCES, DELIVERED ON
WHITSUNDAY.

ACTS i. 8.

*But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost
is come upon you.*

OUR blessed Lord had frequently intimated to his Disciples, not only that they should be qualified by an abundant supply of extraordinary gifts for the arduous task assigned them, of propagating the faith, in opposition to all the powers of this world, but also that a change should be wrought in their own views, dispositions, and affections, such as whilst it would afford them an inward testimony to the truth of the Gospel, should at the same time be to them an earnest of all those transporting promises, which were to receive their adequate fulfilment in the life to come.

The former part of this promise seems to have been limited to the first messengers of God ; and to them, extraordinary powers were requisite. The gift of tongues was required to enable them

to communicate the glad tidings of Salvation to the several nations of the earth ; and the miracles which they were enabled to work, were the most suitable credentials of their divine commission.

The publicity of this investment of the Apostles, assembled at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, and the astonishing display of supernatural power, with which it was accompanied, are circumstances to which it is unnecessary to call your attention. No observation of mine can heighten the account of these things read in the service of this day ; nor can any thing further be required to satisfy a sober mind, as to the part allotted to human agency in the establishment of Christ's kingdom, or to indicate, beyond the possibility of misapprehension, the source and the nature of that power by which it was rendered triumphant.

But these extraordinary powers which were requisite to warrant the first messengers of our Lord, were not those by which themselves were to be advanced in his spiritual kingdom. " In this rejoice not" (saith he) " that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice, because your names are written in Heaven^a." " Covet earnestly (says his Apostle) " the best gifts, and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way^b."

The communications of the Spirit, so much more beneficial to the individual himself, are those

^a Luke x. 20.

^b 1 Cor. xii. 31.

by which his views of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, are rendered more clear, strong, and influential; and the whole of his spiritual constitution, including his apprehensions, dispositions, and affections, is brought to a conformity with the nature and will of God. This is the instruction by which we are qualified to become members of Christ's kingdom in the present life, and partakers of his glory in the next. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his^c;" "but if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead be in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you^d."

Wonderful as this declaration undoubtedly is, and mysterious as the subject of it must be, the one is too explicit to be evaded, and the other much too important to be overlooked.

That the soul of man, by nature destitute of the principle of spiritual life, is to be quickened by the enlivening communications of the Divine Spirit, is one of the most fundamental doctrines of our religion. It is at the same time, that which we find it most difficult to apprehend, and therefore, perhaps, it is the last in which we acquiesce.

As long as self-esteem remains unsubdued by the humbling representations of Scripture, we

^c Rom. viii. 9.

^d Ibid. viii. 11.

cannot perceive the necessity for the change required ; and until our carnal affections have yielded to the sword of the Spirit, that is, until we experience its operation, we can know but little of its nature or extent. And who shall presume on these qualifications, when the best among us will readily admit, that his apprehensions of what it concerns him most to know, his incapacity and demerits on the one hand ; and on the other, the holiness and righteousness to which he should aspire, are as faint and fugitive as a clouded dream ?

Bear with me then, my friends, if supposing that some obscurity may yet rest on this important subject, I proceed to lay before you, with all convenient brevity, the doctrines of Scripture respecting it.

From that Sacred Volume we collect that the imperfections of man's spiritual nature are referable to two heads ; those of his understanding, and those of his affections : the former is darkened, the latter corrupted, and both are estranged from God. These imperfections and perversions He has promised to supply and to rectify, by the gift of his Holy Spirit.

The work of the Spirit of God, therefore, is instruction and sanctification ; and, consequently, that peace and consolation which is attendant on all who live in the consciousness of Divine favour, and in the hope of a blessed immortality.

The want of Divine aid, for the purpose of ad-

vancing our understandings to some proportion with the things relating to the kingdom of God, will, if I mistake not, be readily admitted by those who assent to the representations made to them in the two last discourses, respecting the essential nature of efficient faith, and the natural inability of the human mind to rise to the apprehensions included in the signification of that term.

In the former of these discourses, we endeavoured to shew, that the faith to which the promises of the Gospel are annexed, is not comprized in the mere admission of the truth of the Scriptures, even on a careful review of the evidences by which they are supported:—neither in the correct apprehension of the facts related, or the doctrines therein proposed for our belief. If this were all that is comprehended in the term, few of us, my friends, would be found imperfect, and little room would there be, for any solicitude on the subject of this primary qualification: for I am persuaded that there is not to be found in this congregation, an individual disposed to dispute the authenticity, or the authority of Scripture: and I would willingly hope, that there are few of us widely mistaken, as to the nature of the facts it records, or the doctrines it inculcates. This admission of the authority of Scripture, and of the truth of its doctrines, is requisite to faith as its condition; but in this we discern not its essence nor its power. The truth of Scripture is indeed

the foundation on which it stands, but faith, standing on these foundations, extends its views much farther, even into the regions that lie beyond the present scene of our existence ; regarding the interests therein discovered, with an apprehension of their paramount importance, so close, so forcible, so constant, as to fix our desires, to animate our hopes, and to direct our course through all the seductions belonging to the objects by which we are surrounded on this side of the border that divides us from Eternity. This habitual conversation of the mind, with the things offered to our acceptance, or promised to our exertions in a future life, is Christian faith ; nothing short of this can satisfy the import of the term ; nothing less can be effectual for our security.

In the second of these discourses, an attempt was made to trace to its genuine source, not only the scepticism which daringly oppugns the veracity of the Scriptures, but also that debility of faith, which, though it professes to receive them as the word of God, fails of attaining to a vigorous and abiding apprehension of the matters revealed ; and I think it has appeared, that both the hardy opposition to the truth, which we condemn, and the inability to entertain it, which we must lament, are phænomena which have been fully accounted for, by considering the disproportion between the mind of man, alienated and clouded by his carnal affections, and the remoteness and

spirituality of the matters proposed for his belief. It was thus I endeavoured to bring home to your apprehensions the awful truth, that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Now if the things on which the eye of faith is fixed, are such as had for ever remained undiscovered by man's unassisted reason, nay, after satisfactory proof of their reality and importance, they cannot be forcibly, and therefore not savingly apprehended by his natural powers, is it not reasonable to suppose that the Spirit of truth which makes these discoveries shall also prepare the mind of man for their reception? And may we not humbly hope, that if these concerns are made the subject of our constant and serious reflections, and our course of life directed by such apprehensions as we are capable of, that God will be pleased to manifest to our minds more and more of his adorable Perfections, his Power, his Wisdom, and ineffable Goodness; and that by presenting continually to our view the things relating to his spiritual Kingdom, he will, as it were, lift up the light of his countenance upon us?

But in a matter of such deep concern, we are not left to the inferences of our own judgments. In the Scriptures, where our natural insufficiency is so frequently insisted on, the same remedy is

constantly suggested. Thus we find St. Paul, after stating the source of his own convictions, proceeding in the passage immediately following, to extend to the race of mankind generally, his observations relative to the want of spiritual aid :
 “ For the Spirit of God searcheth all things, yea, even the deep things of God, for what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God, knoweth no man but the Spirit of God*.”

But to place this matter out of all dispute, that spiritual assistance is requisite to impart to us the saving apprehensions of the truths of the Gospel, he thus addresses the Church at Ephesus, “ wherefore, I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, might give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance to the saints.” And shortly after he returns to the same subject of his earnest desire, “ for this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, accord-

* 1 Cor. ii. 10, 11.

ing to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God." It is unnecessary to multiply citations: this may suffice as a specimen of the language of Scripture respecting the growth of faith in the human mind.

But the communications of the Divine Spirit are required for the heart no less than for the understanding, to sanctify the one as well as to enlighten the other. Without this change in the desires and affections, the law can do nothing. The manifestation of the will of God, whether by the light of nature or the voice of revelation, does indeed lay us under an obligation to obedience; but unless the spirit and affections are in unison with the sense of duty, the law is a yoke which we must carry with uneasiness; and our compliance with its demands, must be that of a slave who is coerced, neither hearty nor free, nor effectual, nor at all acceptable in the sight of God. Before this change, Paul himself could do nothing, but now he thanks God that he can do all things through Christ that strengthens him. We are enabled to fulfil the law, only by having

it written in our hearts, whereupon our performances are no longer a sacrifice to duty of what we value and love, more than duty, but the acts of a willing and consenting mind, whose desires, hopes, and affections, are turned from these things to God [A]. Such is the testimony of Scripture to the work of the Spirit, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost ^f." "We have received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear, but we have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba Father ^g." "The kingdom of God is joy in the Holy Ghost ^h." "We are sanctified by the Holy Ghost." This is at once the seal of our acceptance, and the anticipation of future blessedness. Without this the other gifts of God are unprofitable, "for the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned ⁱ". Even faith itself, to be effectual, must be that "which worketh by love ^k." Faith indeed, is the elementary principle of spiritual life in the human soul, but unless it acts on the desires and affections it is nothing; "for though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity I am nothing ^l."

But it is not for us to separate those things which God in the work of salvation hath joined

^f Rom. v. 5.

^g Rom. viii. 15.

^h Rom. xiv. 17.

ⁱ 1 Tim. i. 5.

^k Gal. v. 6.

^l 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

together. The influences of his Spirit on the mind and affections, are not only simultaneous, but intimately connected. By invigorating our apprehensions, it must necessarily produce a suitable change in the affections, desires, and determinations; and in purifying the heart, it releases the mind from that bondage by which it should have been for ever prevented, from advancing in the acquisition of saving knowledge. This will be apparent, when we consider that the things which the Spirit presents to the understanding, are the same that it offers to the affections, and that the mind is not at liberty to have its conversation among them, so long as the desires of the heart are engrossed by things of an opposite character.

It would appear, then, that the promises of spiritual aid, conveyed in the texts already quoted, and many others of the same import, were not confined to the founders of our religion, but meant to be extended to their followers in all ages [B]. There is no one doctrine in which the Churches of Christendom have been more generally or more constantly agreed: and to this concurrence our truly Apostolic Church, constitutes no exception; having frequently, in its Liturgy, either directly or implicitly asserted the same doctrine [C].

Yet there is a distinction between the founders of our religion, and those who have come to the knowledge of its truths by their teaching, which

as it must be attended with a suitable difference, both in the extent and manner of these communications, cannot be overlooked, unless we would neglect the best safeguards of the purity and sobriety of the Christian faith ; and make an unreserved surrender of our holy religion, to the machinations of imposture or the extravagancies of enthusiasm.

In the first place it will not fail to be observed, that to the Apostles, as preachers of a religion new to mankind, the possession of extraordinary powers was requisite both for their own conviction and for the confirmation of their authority, in delivering to others the message with which they were entrusted ; but that Christianity having been once established on a sufficient basis of external evidence, the continuance of these gifts of the Spirit of God is no longer requisite.

This peculiarity in the office of the first Christians, and, consequently, in the powers with which they were invested, has been already adverted to, and it needs not to be insisted on.

In the next place it is to be observed, that, with respect to their own personal instruction, there was for them no established method of learning the truths of religion, which have been transmitted to us by their labours. This is another wide distinction between their condition and that of their followers ; and does it not also establish a corresponding difference in the methods of spiritual

instruction? Of what value would be to us the possession of God's written word, 'if, notwithstanding this provision for our information, the same immediate communications were still necessary to us as it was to the Apostles themselves? Or when was it observed, that so marked a difference in the circumstances of God's creatures, was not attended to, in the dispensations of his mercy?

The Israelites in the wilderness being destitute of other supplies, were sustained by food supernaturally afforded; but no sooner had they set their feet within the borders of the promised land, than this was withheld, and their bodily sustenance, which was equally invigorating, and which, then no less than before, was supplied by the hand of God, came to them, by the usual methods of his Providence.

The like distinction is to be observed between the people of God in the first and after ages of the Church, as to the methods by which their spiritual food has been conveyed to them. To the former, as to the Israelites in the desert, these conveyances were necessarily more immediate: for them the arm of God was bared, and they witnessed the exertions of his power, unobscured by the intervention of any intermediate agency. But the Christian Religion, since its establishment by these methods, has been regularly furnished with a rich supply of means and ordi-

nances, which are, now, the channels in which these conveyances are made to us.

These means by which we are permitted, to hold communion with God, and which he hath ordained for this purpose, are now to be considered; in doing which it may be proper to extend our view to all that He hath himself employed, or afforded for our use, in carrying on the work of spiritual advancement; regarding in this light, whatever is fitted to elevate our minds to God, or to place before our view the certainty of a future existence, and the immense importance of the interests which belong to it.

Of the things which are attended with these effects, some are supplied in the constitution of the moral world, others are instituted by positive appointment; the operation of some is direct by leading our thoughts immediately to the objects of faith, that of others indirect by removing obstructions: some of them God hath placed at our disposal, others he hath for special purposes as yet retained in his own hands: This last distribution of the means of grace, in relation to the power we are permitted to exercise over them, it is most to our present purpose to notice. And did the present occasion permit us to consider, with attention, their adaptation to our several necessities (though we may not pretend to fathom the subject to the bottom,) I doubt not that every step we should take in such enquiry would ex-

tend our views into the depths of the riches of the wisdom and goodness of God. For the present, however, we must be content with a simple enumeration of those provisions which his wisdom hath made for our advancement in his spiritual kingdom, reserving to a future opportunity our more particular observations on their use and efficiency.

Among the means of grace which God hath put into our possession, the most prominent and the most extensively useful is that Sacred Volume wherein we are instructed in his Will, and invited to contemplate his Nature and his Attributes in his dealings with his creatures.

These records I have placed at the head of this enumeration, not only because they contain all the information by which God would light us on our way to life eternal; but more especially, because in them is conveyed every requisite direction, respecting all the other helps which he hath afforded for the same purpose. If the things of God are to be sought for, where shall we seek them rather than in his Holy Word? It is there his Spirit speaks to us respecting all these mighty concerns. “The words that I speak unto you,” (saith our Lord,) “they are Spirit and they are Life.”

In the same class we may place those sacramental ordinances by which we bind ourselves to

^m John vi. 63,

the service of our Maker, and which, whilst they convey to us a lively representation of the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God, and the regenerating influences of his Holy Spirit, are by his appointment the vehicle of those spiritual communications by which we are rendered meet for the inheritance he hath provided for us.

Such also is the privilege afforded us of communicating with God in the exercise of public and private devotion ; and surely we may be persuaded that the prayers we offer up to the throne of grace, shall not return to us fruitless, our Lord himself having promised, that where two or three shall be gathered together in his name, there would he be, in the midst of themⁿ. And having taught us by the most impressive appeal, to look with assurance for the answer to our petitions, “ If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him^o ?

The whole circle of our social duties is likewise to be included among the means of grace, and they become so, most effectually, when in the performance, we are directed by a spirit of obedience to the Divine commands. It is thus that even our worldly concerns are converted into the means of cultivating religious principles and affections, by the occasions they afford of

ⁿ Matt. xviii. 20.

^o Luke xi. 13.

acting on the impressions received from the Spirit of God, and thereby of converting to our spiritual nutriment, the outflowings of his grace. When in the discharge of these duties, we succeed in gaining an ascendancy over our selfish and sinful desires, the operation to invigorate our faith, though indirect, is not less effectual : it is thus that the clouds which had been raised by our evil affections being broken, the eye of faith, is enabled to penetrate into the mystery of godliness, and to discern, in the person of Jesus, God manifest in the flesh, provided with all the blessings of his Spiritual Kingdom. A result offered to our attention by our Lord, when he declares, that “ whosoever doeth his will shall know of his doctrine whether it be of God ?.”

I have enumerated some of the principal of the means, by which God hath enabled us to maintain a spiritual communication with himself. Of these, some are more immediately fitted to elevate our thoughts to the contemplation of the Great First Cause, by the exhibition of his attributes and the declaration of his will. Others are particularly calculated to impress on the mind, the sense of his mercy in the stupendous work of Redemption ; others to kindle its aspirations towards that condition, he hath offered to our hopes : and inasmuch as our spiritual apprehensions are, at best, but weak, our aspirations feeble, our

* John vii. 17.

mental elevations transitory, and the perceptions of faith continually clouded by the vapours which our carnal affections spread before us, in support of this our common weakness, the duties of human life are, by the grace of God, converted into the discipline, by which we are to be released from those spiritual obstructions on the one hand, and confirmed in our spiritual attainments on the other.

2. The religious discharge of our social duties, therefore, whilst it effects the subjugation of those affections, which threaten the extinction of our faith, constitutes, at the same time, the invigorating exercise of this principle, and the test of its strength and maturity.

3. For this reason it is, that we have been engaged by the Captain of our Salvation, in a warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil, nor can we rest secure in our attainments, until we shall have been released from the captivity of sin, raised above the dominion of Satan, and disenthralled from the bondage of our worldly desires; until we shall have attained to that faith which overcometh the world, that faith which shall make us free.

4. The whole of practical religion, therefore, consists in the use of the means of spiritual advancement: and in a manner suitable to their vast importance, the precepts concerning them, meet the eye in every page of Scripture, and in every

variety of form, calculated to impress the imagination, to influence the will, or to engage the affections : at one time delivered as the solicitations of the Friend, at another as the injunctions of the Parent, at another as the commands of the Sovereign, which we are to answer by our obedience.

And let it be observed, my Friends, that whatever be the nature of the means recommended, our thoughts are never diverted from that Being by whose wisdom these dispositions have been made, and whose influences are conveyed to us through this instrumentality. In the holy Scriptures these arrangements are constantly ascribed to His Providence. But this is not all : the word of God does not permit us to regard the constitution either of the natural or moral world, as endued by Him with an energy whereby it may subsequently work its way to its final destination : or as if it were invested with a delegated power, in the contemplation of which we might rest, without raising our thoughts beyond it. The view of the Divine agency which has been afforded us, is much more intimate. According to this view, God is every thing, the creatures are nothing. The arrangements of his Providence are not causes but courses, and the circumstances of our condition, are not the powers but the channels through which his influences are conveyed to us.

Nor are we permitted to suppose, that these

influences are less real or less efficient than if they had been otherwise imparted. The Gospel which instructs us in the use of these means of spiritual improvement, teaches us also to look up, through them, to Him who hath established this mode of communication between Himself and his creatures. And whilst it requires of us to wait upon God in the diligent use of the means of Grace which He hath provided, and in the faithful discharge of the duties He hath prescribed, its language is, uniformly, do this and God will render it effectual. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you, to will and to do, after his good pleasure" [D]."

From what has been advanced, it may not be inferred, that the first movements of the soul towards God, originate within ourselves. We know that "every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh from the Father of lights," and that "we love Him, because He first loved us:" but then it is equally certain that these are the courses in which we are required to seek the Lord, and in which we are sure to find Him.

Hitherto we have considered only those means of grace, which the wisdom of God hath placed at our disposal. By putting us in possession of any such facilities, He hath raised us to the rank

^a Phil. ii, 12, 13.

^r James i. 17.

^s 1 John iv. 19.

not of instruments, but of agents, in carrying on the work of his mercy. He hath appointed us, not only the objects, but the ministers of his goodness, through whom its effects are to be applied to ourselves, and circulated through his creation.

But when we reflect on the indolence of our natural dispositions, respecting the use of those means and opportunities which are always at our command, and the habit of procrastination, which is produced indeed by self-indulgence, but which receives the most powerful encouragement from the persuasion, that the means of recovery are at all times within our reach ; we must acknowledge the wisdom and abundant goodness of the Physician of our souls, in the regard He has shewn to this our natural weakness, by not having abandoned us to ourselves, though put in possession of the means of spiritual advancement. Other interferences are wanting to awaken us from security, and to stimulate us to exertion. These stimulants are ever awakening, when the conscience is not altogether seared, and the impressions they make, though not too powerful to be resisted, are yet too forcible to be mistaken or disregarded. Those visitations of Providence, by which the Almighty would seem to resume to himself the powers we had wantonly abused, are peculiarly fitted to disturb our security, and awaken us to a sense of our condition. The oc-

currence which arrests us in our course, by producing some material change in our external circumstances ; the event which places before our eyes the image of death, the vanity of our pursuits, and the frailty of those supports on which we had confidently relied ; causing every support to vanish from before us except the power of God ; makes an impression, which, however it may be afterwards effaced, is too forcible and too sudden to be mistaken by the most inattentive and unreflecting.

It seems, therefore, that our all-merciful Father would occasionally visit us with helps, which He hath placed beyond our controul, in order to assure the most timid, and awe the most audacious, proving to the most presumptuous, that they cannot ascend up into heaven by their own strength ; and to the timid and distrustful, that they are environed by a Providence which directs the course of nature to the accomplishment of the purposes of his mercy, making "all things work together for good to them that love God." Shewing to both, by the most obvious and striking manifestations of his power, that He does not slumber over the affairs of men.

Happy are we if these warnings are not addressed to us in vain ; but if these are disregarded, our condition is indeed hopeless. We cannot now expect those miraculous manifes-

† Rom. viii. 28.

tations of the Divine agency, which were requisite to ensure attention to the first messengers of the Gospel, and to turn mankind from these courses which were sanctioned by the established usages of society. We are moral and accountable beings, and we cannot reasonably require that God should save us by methods, which would deprive us of moral freedom. These providential visitations are the manifestations suited to our condition ; and to us, who have been already convinced of the Divine origin of our Holy Religion, and who are already imbued with its principles, they are not less awakening than the miracles wrought for the conviction of those who had not previously enjoyed the same advantages. If the guilt of those who fortified themselves against the evidence of miracles, by ascribing them to the power of Satan, was not to be pardoned ; and this, because there remained in the treasury of Heaven no further provisions for their conviction ; shall those escape the like condemnation, who, refusing to listen to the voice of God in these his ultimate appeals, resort to similar artifices to quiet the upbraidings of an alarmed conscience, by ascribing them to chance or nature ?

Be it far from us to place ourselves in the dreadful condition of those on whom these provisions of Grace have been in vain expended. Be it rather the business of our lives, by the diligent use of all those means, which the bounty of God

hath provided, to seek the aid of his Holy Spirit to finish the work he may have begun in us, to quicken, invigorate, and enlarge our apprehensions of the matters proposed to us, to endue us with a penetrating sense of their reality and importance, to animate our hopes, to kindle our desires, to suggest efficient motives and to confirm us in good intentions; to inspire us with patience in afflictions, with fortitude in trials, with resolution in temptations; to exalt our affections above the transitory scene through which lies our road to the inheritance prepared for us; to fill us with a sense of the surpassing love of God, who hath provided all things requisite to the attainment of this end, to teach us to make Him our sovereign good; his Providence our support; his glory our aim; his will our pleasure, and his goodness the unfailing source of our happiness.

NOTES.

[A]

THE Gospel was not designed to lessen or abate the demands of the law. Our Lord himself assures us, that he came not to destroy, but to fulfil the law. And the Gospel which proclaims to us a release from the penalties of those transgressions, incident to our frailty, is at the same time "the ministration of the Spirit^a," by which alone we yield any acceptable obedience.

The Calvinist, by admitting the necessity of sanctification, differs from the Antinomian, and he is anxious to mark the distinction. In opposition to the Antinomian, he maintains, that the reward of Christ's obedience, is our spiritual life; and that this is commenced in the present world by the indwelling of God's Spirit, producing the fruits of righteousness, which is at once the commencement of the reign of Christ, and the pledge of future glory. He does not, therefore, divert our thoughts from every thing in Scripture, but the fundamental doctrine of the Atonement; but whilst he directs us to the holiness consequent on faith, he mistakes the part assigned to it in the Christian dispensation. He will not admit that sanctification is conducive to future blessedness, but regards it merely as the sign or the seal of their acceptance, who by the merits of Christ are already accounted righteous before

^a 2 Cor. iii. 8.

God. According to this scheme of divinity, election and justification, are primary, absolute, and unconditional acts of God, to which sanctification and all its fruits are consequential in God's plan of redemption. Now this theory is opposed by the very passages relied on for its support, which speak of "justification by faith," "and through faith," i. e. by the energetic working of a principle, which turns the mind towards God, whereby, communicating with his Spirit, the heart and affections are rendered conformable to his will; and the being in whom this change is effected, notwithstanding the imperfections of his obedience, becomes an object of divine favour. An interpretation which is abundantly guarded by expressions such as the following, "how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation^b." "If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin; but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries^c." Declarations inconsistent with the notion of absolute decrees, but perfectly harmonizing with the doctrine which teaches that the benefits of Christ's mediation, consist in an offer of grace for the past, and of his renovating Spirit to render us meet for acceptance, benefits which may be abused, and consequently forfeited.

[B]

The reader who would examine farther into the doctrine of Scripture on this subject, may consult with many other places, Isaiah xlii. 3. Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. Psalm li. xi. Luke xi. 13. John iii. 6. and vii. 39. Rom. viii. 9. 11. 26. 1 Cor. ii. 14. iii. 16. vi. 11. xii. 9.

^b Heb. ii. 1. 3.^c Heb. x. 26, 27.

81. 2 Cor. iii. 3. 17, 18. Ephes. i. 13, 14. and iv. 8. 10.

[C]

See in the Morning Prayer, Absolution. Te Deum, Apostle's Creed, and first Response in following verses. The last Response in verses following the Lord's Prayer. Prayers for the Royal Family and for the Clergy, and concluding Benediction. Litany. Prayer for all Conditions of Men. Collects for the Nativity. St. Stephen's Day. Quinquagesima Sunday. Monday in Easter Week. Fifth Sunday after Easter. Sunday after Ascension. Whitsunday. 9th and 19th after Trinity. The Baptismal Service, and that for the Visitation of the Sick. Forms for the Ordination of Priests and Consecration of Bishops, also Articles v. x. xiii. xvi. xvii. xxv. xxvii. The doctrine of Spiritual Influences is not, indeed, made the subject of a separate Article, a distinction to which it may seem well entitled by its vast importance; but then it is to be remembered, that the Socinian Doctrines had made little progress before the year 1600.

[D]

It has been excellently observed, that "it was the duty of Elijah to build the altar, to put the wood in order, and lay the sacrifice upon the pile; but the fire was to come from Heaven that was to inflame it and make it ascend a grateful offering to Jehovah." *Christian Observer*, Jan. 1821, on Special Preparation for the Holy Communion.

This I take to be a happy illustration of the subject under consideration.

DISCOURSE IV.

ON SPIRITUAL INFLUENCES.

ACTS i. 8.

*But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost
is come upon you.*

THE doctrine, which in the preceding part, I have endeavoured with all convenient brevity, to lay before you, relates to two points, distinct, though connected. On the one hand, the necessity of spiritual aid to attain to an efficient apprehension of the things set forth for our belief; and on the other, the channels through which these spiritual influences are derived, and the means by which they are appropriated.

The doctrine of spiritual influences is requisite to the vitality of religion; that of the means confided to us, is no less requisite to its practical operation. Losing sight of the former, religion degenerates into a cold and lifeless system of morality; and without a due regard to the latter, it becomes baseless, visionary, and fanatical.

I am the more anxious my friends, to fix your attention on these two cardinal points, when I call to mind, that of the errors which have distracted the Church of Christ, no inconsiderable portion is to be traced to a mistaken or partial view of the subject now under consideration.

The Unitarian flatly denies the reality of spiritual influences : he seems to think that God having created man, and the world he inhabits, with certain provisions for their maintenance, had then left them to find their way to their final destination ; or that if he has visited his creatures, it is by such providential interferences, as imply a direction of external occurrences, and not in the way of a personal or spiritual communication.

On the other hand, enthusiasts and fanatics, however varying in denomination and cast, seem to concur in overlooking or underrating the value of the means of grace. But as all practical religion consists in the use of such means, it is evident that any error on this subject is of the most mischievous consequence. If God has repeatedly declared that his grace shall attend the diligent use of these means in which all our religious and social duties are comprehended, and that he will withhold it from those who are inattentive or disobedient, it must be apparent that the scheme by which they are excluded or misrepresented, is injurious alike to its professor, to the character of religion, and the well-being of society.

For sake of method, we shall begin with those by whom the doctrine of spiritual influences is opposed ; and afterwards proceed to consider the errors by which it is perverted.

Those who are disposed to overlook or deny the want of spiritual aid, in quickening our apprehension of divine truth, will account for the growth of the principle of faith, in a way perfectly analogous to the common course of nature, by representing it as the necessary result of the application of our thoughts to the matters revealed ; impressed upon us, perhaps, by striking and overpowering occurrences, which, for a time at least, must serve to release us from the dominion of things temporal. These are not disposed to acknowledge any influences external to man himself, except such as are natural ; and it is contended, that these are sufficient for every purpose of excitement ; for that according as these are cherished, and our thoughts in consequence continue to flow in the channels into which they may have been directed, the principle of Christian faith is invigorated, and its fruits become apparent. Though all this is said to be agreeable to those laws by which the moral world is governed, it is admitted that there can be no impropriety in referring the effects so produced, to the Author of the constitution of nature ; nay, that it is agreeable to the spirit of religion, which beholds the finger of God in all the tendencies of

his providential arrangements, to represent the changes wrought in our spiritual condition, as the result of the divine agency on our minds, and that the texts of Scripture which relate to this subject, are to be understood with these qualifications [A].

Now it appears to me, that this representation, is, virtually, a denial of one of the most influential truths which God has been pleased to reveal to us.

It may be requisite to support this opinion by a few observations.

In the first place, it seems too much to concede to these rationalists, that God invariably communicates with his creatures, by the intervention of means and instruments ; we are not warranted by reason, any more than by Scripture, in making this supposition ; for in the concatenation of intermediate causes, (if so they may be denominated) must there not be some which are set in motion by the immediate operation of the first cause ? And if so, what is there to make it improbable that our spirits are, no less frequently than matter, the subject on which that power is immediately exerted ? What is the sense of weakness and guilt, what the reproofs of conscience, what the desire of strength and forgiveness, but the stirrings and strivings of his Holy Spirit imparted to us, or excited within us ? yet such agitations frequently occur without the in-

tervention of any extrinsic causes, or any to us discernible.

But for this we do not contend ; undoubtedly God may take various methods of influencing the minds and hearts of his creatures : nay, we admit that the assistance of lights and helps from above, is often conveyed to us by a disposition of means and instruments, and that the energies of man himself are among the means employed in the work of his own spiritual advancement, that they are among the powers by which he is to be released from the dominion of sinister influences, by which his heart is to be expanded towards God for the good seed he would deposit within it, and by which the preventing grace of God duly working, renders him capable of further and richer supplies.

It is by the use of such means, that man is to effect every thing ; by these he is to maintain a communication with the Father of Spirits, and to convert into his spiritual nutriment the outflowings of his grace. For this purpose, they seem to have been intended. To the power of God, they add nothing, neither are his influences the less real or vivifying than if they had been imparted, by a more immediate communication.

When religion therefore teaches us to acknowledge the energy of God in all things, it does not warrant the expectation of a departure from the established laws of his moral government ; nor is

it at all fair to charge on those who have been enlightened by its instructions, a belief in miraculous interferences, or any interferences out of the ordinary courses of the divine government, it having been distinctly acknowledged, that in the proceedings of the Almighty, his power is exerted according to the courses which his unerring wisdom hath established.

On the other hand, the spirit and truth of all religion is lost, to him whose attention is fixed on means and instruments, so as to be thereby diverted from the contemplation of that Being, whose influences are thus conveyed to us ; who so regards the nature of man, or of the things by which he is surrounded, as if it were endued with an efficiency, which can either quicken or sustain him, without the indwelling power of God ; who permits himself to regard it as an inferior divinity endued with a sort of delegated power, in which he may safely confide without raising his thoughts beyond it.

If the constitution of nature is, indeed, that eternal, and to us, all powerful principle ; let us exchange the lights of religion for those of carnal wisdom : but if those things we denominate second causes, be but instruments by which the power of the Supreme Being is exerted, or the channels through which his influences are conveyed to us, why arrest our desires in their ascent to him, by whom alone they can be satisfied ?

What is the difference between the worldly-minded and the religious, but that the hopes of the one are fixed on earth, whilst those of the other ascend to heaven? And what the distinction between the light of philosophy and that of Scripture, but that whilst the former directs us to the contemplation of means and instruments, the latter reveals to us the all-disposing and all-pervading energy of God? That which the rational philosopher discerns is indeed true; but, alas! it is the least important part of the truth; it is the external husk on which he feeds; the channels emptied of their waters, in which he seeks refreshment.

Such an attempt to transfer the power of the Deity to the things on which it is exerted, may remind you of that debasing philosophy, which, refusing to acknowledge the energetic power of God, discernible even by human reason, in the works of creation, and the arrangements of Providence, vainly sought for this efficiency in causes purely material: I have called it a debasing philosophy, and you will not deem the expression unwarranted, when applied to a system which disclaimed the creative power of God and the protection of his Providence, and would thereby have cut off all communication between mortal man and his Maker.

It cannot be requisite that, in this place, I should describe the distinguishing tenets of this philoso-

phy ; my business, at present, is with the half infidels of modern times : and you will acknowledge, that it is not a remote resemblance, which leads us to compare the attempts by which they would obscure the sacred lights of the Gospel, to those by which the Epicureans of old would have darkened the religion of nature : for whilst they acknowledge the divine original of that light which reveals to view the ulterior destinations of man ; they admit of nothing but human intentions and human exertions, by which that condition is to be attained, blinding themselves to the operation of that Power by which these intentions are suggested and those exertions become efficacious, even the Power of God which is conveyed to us, through those otherwise dry and empty channels.

But those who reject the doctrine of man's fallen condition, conceiving that his natural powers and endowments are adequate to the attainment of all the advantages proposed in the Gospel, will naturally endeavour to explain away the promises of spiritual aid, contained in the word of God ; for it would be in the highest degree absurd to suppose that the helps afforded, should exceed the measure of his necessities. The doctrines we hold relative to the wants of the creature and the bounties of the Creator, are necessarily the counterparts one of the other, and must rise or fall to the same level. He who

discovers in himself nothing but weakness and corruption will, naturally, fly to the source of all spiritual strength for the supply of his deficiencies ; whilst on the other hand, he who deems himself sufficient to satisfy the reasonable demands of justice, cannot see, and therefore will not be ready to admit, the necessity either of redemption or sanctification. The Apostle, who discerns in this ; the delusion of a carnal mind opposing itself to the very power and vitality of religion, nevertheless admits the consistency of these antichristian sentiments. " Verily," says he, " if there had been a law given, which could have given life, righteousness should have been by the law^a." If a simple promulgation of the will of God were sufficient for our direction and security, the astonishing sacrifice in the person of the Son, had never been made as it could not have been called for, and the same may be said of the communications of the Holy Spirit, one of the great benefits thereby provided.

The charge we advance against the Unitarian scheme is not that of inconsistency ; but of the denial of the most vital doctrines of Christianity, and of man's highest privileges under that dispensation : and whilst we object to a system which darkens the most sacred and most needful lights of the Gospel, it becomes necessary to advert to the wretched sophistry employed for

^a Gal. iii. 21.

this purpose. Finding that the promises of spiritual aid for our instruction and sanctification are too numerous and direct to be avowedly rejected, they are to be explained away [B]: it is therefore contended that these promised communications are no other than the natural accompaniments of the means recommended, the necessary result of the application of our thoughts to the subject laid before us, occasionally stimulated into activity by impressive occurrences; and the doctrine of spiritual aid being undermined by the presumed sufficiency of this explanation, it is immediately concluded, that no spiritual assistance is required by man, or imparted by his Creator.

But those who spurn from them, the notion of spiritual aids, are not always influenced by a desire of vindicating the liberty or of asserting the sufficiency of man. Those who would leave man to struggle single handed with the circumstances of his condition, will be found as frequently to favor the notion of his slavery as of his dominion; by attributing to material causes, that influence, which they will not allow to the Spirit of God: thus setting up, on the ruins of Christianity, a system of materialism more debasing than the gross idolatry we charge on some parts of the heathen world, by whose theology, the elements of nature were placed in the throne of that Power, who is the fountain of light and life, and

the only ennobling object of our thoughts and affections [c].

That there is, in the means which God hath provided for the conveyance of spiritual sustenance, a suitableness, or (if you are pleased so to call it,) a natural tendency towards those ends for which they have been instituted, needs not to be denied: and the observation of this fitness may be useful in awakening us to a sense of that wisdom and goodness, which hath provided for our weakness those methods of spiritual communication, as well as in exciting us to diligence in the use of these means, whose adaptation to our necessities is thus offered to our notice. But if, on the other hand, this conduciveness is exhibited so as to weaken the sense of our dependence on God, by excluding from our view, the Power with which we communicate through this instrumentality; is it too much to assert, that the representation is not less ruinous in its consequences than it is false in its spirit?

Be not deceived, my friends; the tendency of such representations, is not to improve your philosophy, but to debase your religion; not to enlighten your understandings by the contemplation of truth; but to darken your minds by the exclusion of that light which surrounds the throne of God, and to impoverish your souls by the rejection of those gifts of his overflowing goodness, compared to which, all other know-

ledge is barren, and all other possessions are mean and unprofitable.

But it cannot be requisite that I should detain you longer on this branch of the Unitarian scheme, in which it appears to be opposed to the doctrine of Spiritual Influences. Enough, I trust, has been said, to shew that this statement of the subject falls far short, of the truth of God's Word, that though it may offer sufficient support to a system of rational morality, it is utterly inadequate to convey to our minds, the light or the power of Christianity.

But the Infidel who disowns the authority of Scripture, or the Unitarian who would reduce its discoveries to the standard of natural reason, are not the only, or the most formidable enemies with which it has to contend. Among its various trials none is so severe, as that to which it is subjected by its professed friends, and the perversions of their mistaken zeal.

The Doctrine of Spiritual Influences has not escaped from these abuses ; and scarcely has less injury been done to religion in this most vital part by those who have formally denied the reality of those influences than by those who have misrepresented the means by which they are imparted.

The Antinomian will not admit that the work of grace has any dependence on human efforts ; fastening on one leading doctrine, that of the

atonement sacrifice of Christ, he deems that this is not merely the foundation, but the finished work, to which, on the part of man, nothing can be added. Persuading himself that Christ died for him, as one of the elect, he fancies that he is at liberty to disregard his instructions. The contents of the Holy Scriptures are thus reduced to a single sentence declaratory of the atonement. His belief of this fact is, to him, not only an assurance of an interest in the merits of the Redeemer, but, the formal notification of the covenant among the Persons of the Godhead, by which all the benefits, thereby purchased, have been fully conveyed to him. Spiritual advancement, by a faithful application of the means of grace, seems to him, a tedious, and perhaps, an irksome process : with a false humility, he rejects as presumptuous, the idea of imitating the blessed Example placed before him : he expects that every thing shall be done without him, and nothing by him, and, therefore, without having applied himself to the work which his Lord and Master had given him to accomplish, he is prepared to present himself at the bar of his judgment, to claim the benefits of an imputed righteousness.

But even those who hold the doctrine in both its branches, (the free grace of God, and the means by which it is conveyed to us,) are not always free from error ; and as there is no subject on which it is more necessary to entertain correct

opinions, it becomes my duty to guard you against those sectarian misrepresentations, by which this essential doctrine has been perverted, and its efficacy impaired. You perceive that I allude to the notions of indefectible grace, of sudden conversions, and sensible impressions.

There is, perhaps, no delusion, so adapted to encourage the neglect or the abuse of the means of spiritual advancement placed at our disposal, as the persuasion, that because the purposes of God cannot be frustrated, the gifts of his mercy cannot be forfeited. Under this impression, no danger is regarded with apprehension, no departure from the ways of sobriety and peace can awaken us to a godly jealousy of ourselves. Among all the drugs which Satan has ever administered, there is not an opiate of such power to deaden the pains of a wounded conscience, those salutary pains, by which the Author of our being would urge us to escape from perdition : yet even this poison, some have had the perverse ingenuity to extract from the Word of God [D] that word wherein he speaks to us so frequently and forcibly of the strivings of his Holy Spirit, and the judicial blindness which is the consequence of our obstinate resistance to his solicitations.

These are threatenings, which we are not at liberty to despise ; the provisions for their execution are made in the constitution of our nature, whose sensibility is always deadened, and whose

vitality is eventually destroyed, by the resistance we make to these life-giving influences. Such is the course of nature ; and reason teaches us to regard it as the judicial process of Him who is the Author of nature, and who, then, is fitly said to take his Holy Spirit from us.

These are considerations which may well alarm the best among us. How oft do we grieve God's Holy Spirit ? How oft do we resist his suggestions ? How frequently do we turn away from the things he would set before us, or when that is impracticable, how do we seek to quiet the upbraidings of an awakened conscience, by proposing to ourselves a more convenient season for conforming to his admonitions ? As if we could seriously imagine, that by affording the enemy of our souls another triumph over our weakness, and by overpowering the admonitions of conscience, our spiritual strength shall remain unimpaired, our condition equally hopeful, and that we shall stand on the same vantage-ground, with respect to our Christian warfare ?

But we are not easily alarmed at the dangerous consequences of a step which we fondly imagine we may retrace at pleasure, and though the minister of the Gospel raises his warning voice, to set before us that moral degradation to which we approach, by every step taken in opposition to the direction of our conscience, and the steep course of which it is the frightful commence-

ment: though he speaks of a course as certain and determinate as any process of nature, yet self-confidence, presuming on its fancied dominion over its own actions, is not easily **discomposed**. Nay, when he shews, (humanly **speaking**) with what peculiar jealousy, God seems to retain in his own hands, the issues of life and death: when he shews, by the most striking examples, how sudden and unexpected the **summons**, by which the loan of life, and all the opportunities it comprises, is resumed: we have seen that the impression is rarely answerable to the magnitude of the dangers he presents. We fondly imagine that our dissolution is not so near, but that frequent opportunities of reformation will yet occur; and as we suspect not our power over our own actions, we continue to abuse those opportunities, and weaken that very power in which we so presumptuously confide.

To those who seek to encourage themselves by such delusions against the admonitions of Scripture and of conscience, I would say, not merely that opportunities of reconciliation may be withdrawn by an offended God, or though continued, that after each instance of wilful transgression, they become less disposed to derive from them, those benefits which they were intended to convey; but I would warn them that in every such instance of resistance to the suggestions of God's Holy Spirit, they make a breach in their moral

constitution, which never can be fully repaired, either in this life or in the life to come: that they never shall stand on the same eminence on which the Hand of God would have placed them.

Awful is the state of him who does desptight to the Holy Spirit—"all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come^b."

I am aware that this denunciation has been limited, by certain learned Expositors, to the aggravating circumstances of the guilt of those to whom it was addressed;—an effort of certain obstinate unbelievers to shelter themselves from the evidence of incontestible miracles, by ascribing them to the delusive power of Satan; a crime with which, since the Apostolic Age, none can be chargeable to the same extent. Be it so—yet is it not reasonable to conclude that every degree of the same offence, must, in its due proportion, fall under similar condemnation? This, perhaps, we shall be more ready to admit, if we consider what it is that constitutes the essence and the odiousness of sin in the sight of God—that it is not the external act of disobedience to God, nor the injury inflicted on our fellow-mortals, however formidable the amount. St. Paul himself was a

^b Matt. xii. 31, 32.

blasphemer and injurious, and if he found Grace, he tells us, it was because he did it ignorantly and in unbelief. The essential character of Sin, is that it is a transgression against conviction—a resistance to the suggestions of God's Holy Spirit, speaking to our consciences: and this shall be the condemnation of all who shall be finally banished from the Divine Presence. Accordingly the dreadful denunciations of our Lord now alluded to, far from being limited to the particular circumstances of the guilt of those persons to whom it was immediately addressed, may be presumed to include, in their several degrees, all, who by endeavouring to evade or subdue their internal convictions, should, like those Pharisees, carry on an infernal war against God's Holy Spirit.

I have not presumed to assert, that every such wound men inflict on their immortal souls, shall necessarily bereave them of all spiritual strength, or render their condition absolutely hopeless; but that its effects shall continue through Eternity, either in the subtraction from the Glory to which otherwise they might have attained; or what is far more probable, in the positive degradation, dated from such disaster, as from a new æra in the history of their Christian warfare. Other transgressions may be forgiven,—i.e. means and opportunities may be unwittingly misapplied or neglected; but when the sense of

duty, fails to exert a suitable influence on the conduct ; when men transgress against their secret convictions ; in every such instance, they necessarily weaken the connexion between their practice and persuasions, their belief and their deportment,—they diminish the efficacy of those communications of God's Grace,—they injure their own spiritual capability, and approach by alarming strides, towards the condition of those, who preceding them in such a course, have found that its end is irretrievable ruin.

Be not surprised, that I say, they approach to that condition. The inmates of Hell are not supposed to be ignorant of their interests or their duties : but if their condition is hopeless, it is because the knowledge of Divine Truth, has on them no practical influence ; having lost all spiritual vitality, the provisions of God's inexhaustible Mercy, convey to them no spiritual sustenance : the medicines of his Grace contain for them no healing Power. How truly does the Apostle describe this desperate and despairing condition?—"To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good, I find not : for the good that I would, I do not : but the evil which I would not, that I do." "O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this Death ?"

* Rom. vii. 18, 19. 24.

Where then is the hope of the relapsed Sinner who has delivered himself to Satan, to be bound with a sevenfold chain? Is it in the Mercy of God? But the Provisions of His Mercy have been rendered fruitless, and what shall they now avail him who has removed himself so much farther from their influence? Nay, the Mercy of God is now to be shewn him by relinquishing the contest, and leaving him in darkness. I say that God is engaged by his very attribute of Mercy, to treat him in this manner; for since by the wilful abuse of His Grace, we advance in guilt, it must be an act of goodness to withdraw from us the means whereby we should only deepen the pit of our destruction. Reason, therefore, concurs with the tremendous declaration of the Word of God, that "if we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of Judgment, and fiery indignation which shall consume the adversaries. He that despised Moses' Law, did without mercy, under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, that he shall be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the Covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing; and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace? For we know him that hath

said, Vengeance belongeth unto me—I will repay, saith the Lord.—It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God^d.”

The Doctrine of indefectible Grace, is the strong hold of Fanaticism: that of sudden conversions, and sensible illuminations, is perhaps more the favourite of Enthusiasm.

The belief in sudden conversions is supposed to be warranted, by the striking effects of the preaching of the first messengers of the Gospel, on Jews and Gentiles. But until it can be shewn, that the case of Christians who have been educated in the habitual persuasion of the Truth of their Religion, is the same with that of Jews and Pagans, by whom it had been unheard of, until preached to them, perhaps, at an advanced period of life; and until it can also be shewn, that the same methods of producing conviction, may now be employed, i. e. by the working of miracles; the advocates of this notion, cannot, properly, avail themselves of facts of this kind, as illustrative of the process of improvement in the professors of Christianity.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son has also been much relied on in support of the same opinion: but it should be observed that this is not an Image of Conversion; but of Repentance, produced by the afflicting consequences of a course of vicious self-indulgence: and that the part of the parable, which characterises the Dis-

^d Heb. x. 26—31.

ciple, who, bred up in the Light of the Gospel, continues to walk with his God, according to its precepts, is that which relates to the eldest son, who had remained under the protection of his father. It is not for such a one to express any jealousy of those whom God has snatched from the jaws of ruin. He has enough to console him in the declaration, "Son thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine*."

The arguments which have been drawn from the nature of the thing, are not more successful, than those which have been adduced from Scripture. An Author, whose works I quote with respect, whilst I differ from him, on this, as well as many other points of doctrine, conceives that he has established the notion, that the work of Regeneration is necessarily instantaneous, by the following argument: "it is intuitively certain," says he, "that a man is, at every given period of his life, either holy or unholy; there is a period, in which every man who becomes holy at all, first becomes holy; at a period immediately antecedent to this, whenever it takes place, he was not holy; the commencement of holiness in his mind, was, therefore, instantaneous, or began to exist at some given moment of time."

Now the tenet expressed in the conclusion of this argument is, indeed, most harmless; and we

* Luke xv. 31. Dwight's System of Theology, Vol. III. Sermon lxxiv.

may venture to assert, that it never was, and never will be controverted. The commencement of holiness, undoubtedly belongs to some one instant, in the same sense, in which every work whatever, may be said to begin at some one instant. This is saying nothing ; nor is it an expression of the notion of the suddenness of conversion, which is the thing this writer proposes to establish. But the commencement of a work is very different from its completion, and the argument, as applied to the latter, assumes the very thing it was intended to demonstrate.

The question is, whether the work of conversion is instantaneous or gradual. He assumes, that it is of the former kind ; and then, by stating this assumption, he thinks he has proved it. There is no position, that may not be as readily established in this way ; we have but to assume, that every man is great or small, to prove that his bodily stature is the work of an instant. In fact, the time required for effecting different changes, is as variable as can well be imagined : some are apparently instantaneous, whilst others are the work of much time, as well as of application. Nay, the same observation may be extended to changes of the same kind : even these are not always accomplished with the same degree of celerity.

Conviction is a change in the persuasions of the mind : and where there are no prejudices to

be encountered, and where the arguments are few and strong, and the apprehension to which they are addressed, is clear and discriminating, a change of opinion may be effected by a conversation of a few moments : But let us make the contrary suppositions, that there are many and inveterate prejudices to be removed ; that the lights brought to bear on the subject, instead of being striking, are faint and dubious ; or, which is the same thing, that the intellectual vision is weak and undiscerning : it is easy to conceive the absurdity of expecting an instantaneous result, or of specifying any limited time in which it must necessarily be effected. Now religious conversion is not merely a change of views and opinions, but of sentiments of the heart, of dispositions, affections, inclinations, habits, and pursuits ; and to speak of this, as we should of an electric shock, is to speak of it in a manner, neither warranted by experience, nor by the declarations of Scripture.

In what has been said, it cannot for a moment be supposed, that I mean to set any limits to the power of God, or to the efficacy of his grace, when applied to the human heart ; nay, it is admitted, that there are on record, instances of sudden conversions : but these were the effects of miraculous attestations, or of providential occurrences scarcely less striking. And it may be confidently asserted, that such is not the working

of the means of grace committed to our management, or applied to us in the ordinary dispensations of Providence.

At the first introduction of Christianity, extraordinary attestations were necessary, and such have been afforded, not only for the support of the individuals to whom this extraordinary commission was entrusted, but also for the conviction of those to whom their message was to be addressed ; but since the full establishment of our holy religion, it is regularly provided with a rich supply of means and ordinances, which are now the appointed vehicles of God's spiritual communications, and the instruments by which the work of grace is carried on in the human heart. We are now to approach him by the diligent perusal of his written word ; by attendance on the instructions and exhortations of the constituted teachers of his Church, by which it is elucidated and enforced ; by the devout participation in the Holy Communion ; by the regular practice of public and private prayer ; by the religious discharge of the duties of our respective stations ; by diligent examination of our conduct and our motives ; by the restraint of all those propensities which would carry us away from these things, and by " watching thereunto with all perseverance." Such are the means, whereby we are now to maintain a communication with the Father of Spirits, provided by his wisdom, afforded by his bounty, and

confirmed by his authority. For this end they have been appointed, and those who now fancy that they have been favoured with extraordinary visitations, attribute to the government of the Deity, that which, even in the Apostolic ages, was neither vouchsafed nor expected, an unnecessary departure from his established laws. And if this fancy is accompanied with the habitual neglect of the means appointed, or the duties prescribed ; if it is found to be connected with vanity, or the affectation of singularity ; with arrogant pretensions ; with uncharitable censure, or moroseness of character and conduct ; there is too much reason to suspect of such religionists, that they have “ a lie in their right hand ^f ;” and that the faith of which they boast, is the delusion of a carnal spirit, instead of a light from Heaven. Such should be earnestly exhorted to attend to the admonition of the Apostle, addressed by him to persons of this stamp and character. “ Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you ? let him shew out of a good conversation, his works with meekness of wisdom, but if you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth ; this Wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish : but the wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated,

^f Isaiah xliv. 20.

full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy *."

It may be difficult, nay, to us, impossible to estimate the relative danger, of the several conditions of professing Christians; yet when he who acknowledges the glorious light of the Gospel, and professes to regard its discoveries, as the source of all his consolations and enjoyments, is observed to apply this light to direct the walk of others, and not his own; to discover the darkness and misery by which he is surrounded, and not that from which he is himself required to escape; such should be warned, that he is at least as far removed from the power of Christianity, as those whose condition he affects to lament; and that the elevation, from which he looks down, whilst it affords him no solid support, is only the measure of his own deeper destruction [E].

Those who look for no reformation, but such as is instantaneous, or at least sudden, are naturally led to hold the opinion, that the impressions of the divine Spirit on their minds, are also perceptible. Indeed, the notions of sudden conversions and perceptible impressions, must stand or fall together; inasmuch as a mighty change, such as is implied in the word conversion; a change in the objects by which the mind is engaged; its views, its ends, its desires, and affections; a change

* James iii. 13, 14, 15. 17.

from darkness to light, and from Satan to the power of God ; if sudden, must be the effect of an agency too powerful in its operation to pass unnoticed.

But if on the contrary, this change, however great and wonderful, is dependent on the diligent use of the means of grace confided to us : if, like all other effects of habit, this also is produced and confirmed, by the habitual regard to the suggestions of the Divine Spirit, speaking to our minds and to our consciences, and by the habitual obedience to its dictates ; there can be no room whatever for supposing, that these impressions should be perceptible ; or, that excepting in their tendency, they should be at all distinguishable from any other suggestions, by which our minds are effected. And assuredly our experience of other influences does not warrant the expectation, that the visitations of God's Holy Spirit, should be attended with any such notification. Those who are aware of the difficulty with which the mind of man detects the motives by which he is actuated in the various particulars of his worldly demeanour ; he that has noticed the palpable mistakes, and gross misrepresentations, made by persons of the most unsuspected candour, when they attempt to account to others for their conduct ; cannot reasonably suppose, that the mind, when its attention is engrossed by the matters suggested, is in a condition the most favourable

for reflecting on the changes of its own sensibility, or of the efficiency of the motives presented to it by God's Holy Spirit.

The expectation, therefore, that the human mind should readily notice those influences, which quicken its sensibility to the motives presented by the Gospel, derives no support from reason or experience ; neither is it authorised by our inspired teachers : nay, as if for the purpose of discountenancing all such fancies, which minister to false apprehensions, or false security, it is plainly intimated by our Lord himself, that these influences, however palpable, with respect to the direction thereby given to our views and our endeavours, shall be, with respect to the original communication, as much concealed from our observation, as the most mysterious process in nature : " the wind bloweth where it listeth," (saith our Lord) " and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth ; so is every one who is born of the Spirit^b." In this, as in other processes, which are termed natural, the hand of God works unseen ; " verily thou art a God that hidest thyself¹." He hides himself behind second causes, and it is through these, which alone offer themselves to our immediate observation, that the mind of man is enabled to contemplate the

^b John iii. 8. ¹ Isaiah xlv. 15.

workings of that energetic power, which is conveyed to us by their instrumentality.

Neither need we feel any uneasiness in the want of a more immediate sense of these visitations, with which some have flattered themselves, when we consider that the thing of which we are required to assure ourselves, is our own actual condition ; and that this is to be ascertained, not by an immediate perception of God's visitations, but by the consideration of the objects by which our minds are engaged, our desires engrossed, our affections animated, and towards which, our pursuits are habitually directed. On the subject of these enquiries, the Scripture is full and explicit ; and the tests which it supplies, are numerous and decisive. It tells us that " where our treasure is, there shall our heart be also ^k ;" that " they that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh ; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit^l ; that " he who hath this hope purifieth himself, even as he is pure ^m." And further, as if to guard us against the delusions of self-love, in the work of self-examination, it directs us to the outward and visible fruits of the Spirit. It is thus only we can estimate the condition of others ; and it is thus also, we must verify the decisions of our judgment respecting our own. Accordingly, the Scriptures abound in precautions such as the following : " the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness,

^k Matt. vi. 21.

^l Rom. viii. 5.

^m 1 John iii. 3.

and truth.” And, again, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance^o ;” “let every man prove his own work^p ;” “be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap ; for he that soweth to the flesh, shall, of the flesh also, reap corruption ; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap everlasting life^q.”

It seems therefore, that there can be little room for these distressing doubts, with which some perplex themselves, when they would ascertain, whether they are the objects of these communications. The tests with which the Scriptures abound, are easily applied by every honest mind. If our sense of our own insufficiency and unworthiness, has thoroughly weaned us of all presumptuous notions of self-dependence ; if not in ourselves, or in the creatures, but in the Gospel, we seek the supply of all our wants ; if we can assure our consciences, that under the guidance of its light, our course is directed to ends yet more distant than any which this world presents, and our views to objects more exalted than any thing it contains ; if not only our views, but our affections, are directed to things of a higher order, to God the author and giver of all ; if we not only receive all things from our heavenly Fa-

^a Ephes. v. 9.

^o Gal. v. 22, 23.

^p Gal. vi. 4.

^q Gal. vi. 8

ther, but refer all things to that same Being, beholding in them the duties he hath prescribed, or the means he hath provided, for the furtherance of our spiritual concerns; living not only by God, but to God: if we feel that his Commandments are not grievous, but on the contrary, that his yoke is easy, and his burden is light: if we delight to fulfil his will, and within the sphere of our influence, to extend and apply the benefits of those provisions he hath made for the well-being of his creatures, here and hereafter: we may without presumption, "assure our hearts before him"; we may look up to him, not only with humble reverence, but with filial confidence, in the persuasion, that the Spirit of truth only, could have wrought in us these convictions and dispositions, having "taken of the things of Christ, and shewn them unto us."

And here, my friends, whilst we consider those consolations which the goodness of God has provided in his word, we see new reason to adore the wisdom of that Being, who hath directed our attention to those tests of our actual condition, rather than to the evidences of those impressions he makes on our minds, which, if they could be discerned, would serve, at best, but to satisfy a vain curiosity; perhaps to puff up with vain confidence, by tempting us to rest in the content-

* Matt. xi. 30. * 1 John iii. 19. * John xvi. 14.

plation of advantages which may be misapplied, and of helps which might be forfeited.

It is not the bounty of God we should distrust, but our own unwillingness to profit by it ; for of this we are assured, that spiritual aid is never withheld from such as diligently seek it ; nay, our blessed Lord condescends, by an appeal to our own feelings, to convince us that this must be so. " If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father, give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him " ? But then these gifts, which are never withheld from our earnest solicitations, must be, not only, faithfully treasured, but diligently applied ; lest the measure of God's grace, which is also that of our responsibility, be to us only the measure of our final ruin.

O then, my friends, how does it behove us " to walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise," giving no advantage to our ghostly enemy ; but " redeeming the time, because the days are evil " ? How nearly does it concern each of us, to ask himself this momentous question, whether he has lost any, and what opportunities of improving his spiritual concerns. It is a question, which may strike with dismay the best among us ; we should do well, however, to repeat it, and not to shrink from the truth, though the scene it should disclose, be that of our

^u Luke xi. 13. ^x Ephes. v. 15, 16.

misery ; for though the past cannot be recalled, yet the sense of the wrong we have done ourselves, may, with respect to the future, serve to awaken that vigilance, which is so well suited to the magnitude of the stake we manage ; and (in the short space we have to run) to the ruin into which we may sink, or the glory to which we should aspire.

NOTES.

[A]

THIS account of the subject is contained in the "Review of Mr. Wilberforce's Treatise, in Letters to a Lady," Letter VII. I quote the Author's words.—"It has never yet been proved that any supernatural influence upon the mind is necessary under the Divine Government, or that it has ever existed, except in a few very extraordinary cases. Every philosophic Theist will allow, that all events are brought to pass agreeably to the Divine Fore-knowledge, and according to the wise and benevolent counsels of God. Also that a Divine agency is actually exerted in every event, according to certain rules which God has prescribed to Himself, few will deny. True Philosophy and true Religion, lead us to see God in every thing. But that He ever, much more that He frequently deviates from his usual course, to produce effects upon the Human Mind, which would not have resulted from the natural operation of general laws, is a fact improbable in itself, and of which we have no satisfactory evidence, either from Experience or Revelation. In popular language, the virtuous affections of virtuous men are with great propriety ascribed to God; and the pious writers of the Scriptures have often adopted this form of Expression. Whether they themselves believed in the existence of frequent supernatural

operations upon the mind, does not clearly appear ; and it is certain, that they no where affirm, that it constituted any part of their commission to teach this extraordinary and improbable doctrine. The agency which they admitted, extends to Evil as well as Good. It hardens the heart of Pharaoh as well as opens that of Lydia, and therefore it is a general and not a particular influence. Consequently the popular language of the Sacred Writings, by no means authorizes the conclusion that God ever interposes supernaturally, to produce moral effects upon the mind ; the expectation of which is liable to great abuse, and has often been productive of very pernicious consequences."

I have here transcribed at length the passage in which the author of the Letters has delivered his own view of the subject, and to which, according to his statement, the expressions of Holy Writ on the same subject may be reduced. It is admitted that a Divine Energy is actually exerted in every event, according to certain rules which God has prescribed to Himself. That true Philosophy and true Religion lead us to see God in every thing. Also that, "in popular language, the virtuous affections of virtuous men, are with great propriety ascribed to God, and the pious writers of the Scriptures have often adopted this form of expression." Such is the mode by which the writer, and others of the same stamp, would attempt to undermine the doctrine of Scripture relative to spiritual Influences.

Now we are not disposed to quarrel with the language of Philosophy or that of the People ; what could be discerned by Reason is true, and we are not to be surprised if it has not discerned the whole, or the most material part of the Truth. Reason is chiefly conver-

sant with second causes : these it magnifies ; whilst the nature of the only efficient cause, is imperfectly discerned, and its operations but faintly apprehended. It is the part of Revelation, to help this our natural infirmity ; by fixing our regards on Him, whose power pervades all things ; and whose influences are conveyed to us, through the intervention of means, which are destitute of all independent efficiency. We do object, therefore, to those who would bring us back from the light of Revelation, to the twilight of reason. And we think the supposition not only unwarrantable but irreligious, that the declarations of God, in his Holy Word, respecting his dealings with us, are mere popular representations, which, so far from adding to the discoveries of reason, are to be pared down to this standard.

Without falsifying the views of natural reason, on the subject of the immediate operation of second causes on our minds, we do contend, that Revelation carries us much farther in its account of this subject. It teaches us to ascribe certain events to God, not merely, because He is the Author of the general Laws, according to which, things proceed in the natural or moral world ; nor because He foresees the effects in which they terminate, in each particular instance. The view which it affords of the agency of God, is much more close and impressive. In the language of the Bible, the creatures are as nothing, and God is all in all. It is God that confounded the language of the builders of Babel : it is He that rained fire upon Sodom : it is He that speaks to the Patriarchs and Prophets : it is He that turneth the hearts of Kings, to those counsels which decide the fate of empires. He is frequently thus spoken of, without any allusion to

the means, if any there were, by which He operated ; and when these are mentioned, it is still to the exertion of the Divine power alone, and not to any energy in the things themselves, that our thoughts are directed.

They who reject the doctrine of spiritual influences, will of course deny the personality of the Holy Ghost. They cannot do less : and accordingly, we find the Father of the modern sect of Unitarians, thus expressing his notions on the subject. “ There is very little in the Scriptures that could give any idea of the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit, besides the figurative language in which our Lord speaks of the Advocate or Comforter, as we render it, (*παράκλητος*) that was to succeed him, with the Apostles after his ascension. But our Lord’s language is, upon many occasions, highly figurative ; and it is the less extraordinary that the figure, called personification, should be made use of by him here ; as the peculiar presence of the Spirit of God, which was to be evidenced by the power of working miracles, was to succeed in the place of a real person, viz. himself, and to be to them, what he himself had been, viz. their advocate, comforter, and guide.” *Priestley’s History of the Corruptions of Christianity, Sect. 7.*

Here the Holy Ghost is the power of working miracles personified. How the possession of this power should comfort the Apostles, as being to them a proof of the favour of God, in selecting them for the great work of the ministry, we can easily suppose : but how this power was to be also their advocate and guide, we cannot so easily imagine without the assistance of this Author, which he has not vouchsafed to give us. Indeed, how the denial of the Personality of the Holy

Spirit, is to be reconciled with the following Scriptures, may be difficult for any of his followers to determine. In Matthew xxviii. 19. our Lord directs his Disciples to "go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Acts xiii. 2. "The Holy Ghost said, separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I called them." John xiv. 25, 26. "These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you, but the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." Here the words are such as indicate a person distinct from the Father, who is represented, not as giving, but as sending the Holy Ghost: and distinct from the Son, inasmuch as He shall not only teach from himself, but remind the Disciples of all that Christ had already taught them. In Acts xvi. 6. we read that Paul and Silas "were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia." In Acts xix. 1, 2. we learn that Paul, arriving at Ephesus, found certain Disciples, who being but imperfectly instructed, had not until then, so much as, heard, whether there be a Holy Ghost. Surely, this cannot be supposed to mean, that they had not heard of miracles performed for the confirmation of the Truth of the Gospel; or that these things had carried no conviction to their minds. In Acts xx. 28. St. Paul thus exhorts the Elders at Ephesus; "take heed to all the flock, over which, the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers." In 1 Cor. ii. 13. He declares that He speaks not in the words suggested by human wisdom, "but that which the Holy Ghost teacheth." In 1 Cor. vi. 19. we have

the following expression. "Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost." And in Heb. iii. 7, "As the Holy Ghost saith." In Heb. ix. 8. the Holy Ghost, whose peculiar office is to teach, is said to have signified by the repetition of the sacrifices in the first tabernacle, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest. In Ephes. iv. 30. we are warned not to grieve the Holy Spirit. And surely the promise to the Disciples, contained in John xiv. 26. already quoted, cannot apply to the conviction already produced by the miracles, of which they had been eye-witnesses. To these we might add, Math. iii. 11. Luke i. 15. xi. 13. 2 Cor. xiv. Tit. iii. 5. Heb. vi. 4. Psal. li. 11.

It is left to the candid reader to judge, whether the above places, and multitudes of others which he may readily add, can, by any fair interpretation, be accommodated to the Unitarian scheme.

[B]

The writer of the Letters, &c. labours hard to accommodate to this view, the places of Scripture relating to the Doctrine of Spiritual Influences. "The Apostles," says he, "were commanded to preach the Gospel to the idolatrous heathen, as well as to the chosen family of Abraham, and they were authorized to confirm their doctrine by miracles. These extraordinary powers are, in Scripture, called the Spirit of God, and the Holy Spirit; and the great change which took place, in the views, feelings, and character of Pharisaic Jews and Idolatrous Heathens, when they sincerely professed the Christian faith, is called a new creation, regeneration, rising from the dead, and the like. And as conversion to Christianity, was usually produced by the evidence of

miracles, this new creation, regeneration, or passing from death unto life, is, in this sense, ascribed to the Spirit of God."

Such is the writer's explanation of the texts of Scripture, which relate to the Doctrine of Spiritual Aid: an explanation calculated to excite mirth, were the subject less awfully interesting. Here it is represented that the operation of the Spirit is limited to the performance of miracles; and the promises of Spiritual aid, to the attestations thereby afforded to the truth of the Gospel.

This account he had learnt from his Master; for which, and the answer, see preceding note.

Nor is the discipline required by the writer of the Letters more correct, than his view of the doctrines of Christianity. "A Christian," (says he,) "is not required to be more holy, nor permitted to take greater liberties upon one day than another, whatever is lawful or expedient upon any one day of the week, is, under the Christian Dispensation, equally lawful and expedient on any other day." (Let. 11.)

It might be supposed that he had learned his practical divinity, not from the Bible, but from the political philosophy which had lately illuminated a neighbouring country.

In the Bible, he would have found that the command delivered to the Israelites respecting the sanctity of the Sabbath, was part of the moral Law, and therefore of perpetual obligation. The reprimand given by our Lord to the Jews, respected only the superstitious observance of the Sabbath, and did not afford any encouragement, to overlook the distinction, between it and the other six days of the week. He was himself an observer of the Sabbath; (see Matt. xii, 9. Mark i.

21. and vi. 2. Luke vi. 6. and xiii. 10.); and that he was so habitually, we learn from Luke iv. 16. 31, 32, 33. So likewise were the Apostles, as we gather from Acts i. 12. xiii. 4. xviii. 4. And that the first day of the week was set apart for public devotion by the infant Church, we learn from 1 Cor. xvi. 2. The writer of the Letters, however, ascribes no peculiar sanctity to the Sabbath; and we have his licence, to transact all our wordly business, to buy and sell, on that day as freely as on any other.

[C]

It is curious to observe the inconsistency in which men involve themselves, by every step in their departure from truth. The observation to which the present note refers, suggests another instance of this; one out of the many, which occur in the Answer to Mr. Wilberforce's Treatise. We beg leave to quote the words of the writer. "He therefore is not a Unitarian, in the proper sense of the word, who either receives Jesus as truly God; or who, in words, denying his divinity, regards him as the delegate of the Father, in the formation and administration of the world." (Let. XXI.)

Now we may return this pointed shaft of the author of the Letters, by asking, is he a Unitarian, in the proper sense of the word, who professing to deny the Divinity of the system of nature, regards it as endued with a delegated power, by the Supreme Being, in the influences supposed to be exerted by it, over the superior world of immortal spirits? Shall he, who attributes such potency to second causes, over the moral and intellectual world, escape the charge of polytheism, which he would fix on those who maintain the existence and power of the other Persons of the Godhead?

[D]

In a recent publication, the doctrine of indefectible grace, is supposed to be established by the following texts; “ My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand^a ;” and, “ I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord^b .”

And the improvement of these passages is as follows: “ Were Christ’s sheep to perish, even the feeblest of them, for whom he gave his life a ransom, Christ himself would lose a part of his reward: and not only so, but the honour of the Divine Justice itself would be tarnished; as it would be, in fact, a violation of an express compact, into which the Father had originally entered with him.” And again, “ Well may he have hope with God, who is thus justified by faith in Jesus Christ! Well may he hope, whilst trusting in the power of his risen and ascended Lord, his righteousness and his life, bid a holy defiance to all the enemies of his salvation; to destroy the feeblest of Christ’s sheep, he must pluck them out of his hand, who died to redeem, and who rose to save them; the task they undertake, is nothing short of spoiling him of the reward of his obedience, a reward secured to him by the promise and oath of God^c .”

Now it will be allowed, that these, and many other such passages of Scripture, are fitted to inspire the

^a John x. 28.

^b Rom. viii. 38, 39.

^c Chase’s Antinomianism Unmasked, p. 169, &c.

most unlimited confidence in the Captain of our Salvation, and his matchless power and skill to combat with all the enemies of our souls. By him, all things have been ordered, for the attainment of the end he proposed to himself. Nay, the most furious assaults, and artful devices of Satan, are rendered subservient to the same purpose; all these things are, by the grace of God, converted into the means of confirmation and strength, and spiritual advancement, to those who submit to his guidance. But can it be asserted that these passages are calculated, to inspire us with confidence, in the security of our condition, against those enemies we harbour within ourselves? To assure us, that all within is safety? That we have nothing to apprehend, from worldly affections and carnal lusts; from the blindness, with which we wilfully darken ourselves against every representation, and the resistance we make to every impression, that would disturb us from that condition, in which we repose with so much satisfaction? Or from that internal frailty, by which we are ever in danger of falling from the grace of God, and of being again brought under the dominion of sin? Assuredly not; and the least attention to the bearing of those passages in the context, may satisfy us, that the confidence, they were intended to inspire, relates, not to those dangers which belong to our own carnal will and frailty; but to the difficulties by which the Christian is beset from without.

Attending to the circumstances in which the former declaration was made by our Lord, we find him accosted by certain of the Jews, who having heard his discourses, and witnessed his miracles, persist, as on other occasions, in their endeavours to evade

the force of his representations, and of the authority by which they were supported ; whereupon he directs their attention, to the real source of their incredulity, by shewing them, that it was to be ascribed to the unfairness and obstinacy of their own characters ; and not to any deficiency in the evidences laid before them : contrasting this perversity of character, with the honest simplicity of his true disciples, whose relation to him is represented, by that of sheep to their shepherd. And he then proceeds to the assurance, that this confidence and docility should be amply rewarded, by the provisions, which he, the good Shepherd, had made for their security : such shall not be lost, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand.

In this discourse of our Lord, we may observe that two distinct comparisons are instituted ; first, between the obstinacy of those unbelieving Jews, and the honesty and teachableness of those, who were then, or should afterwards become, his disciples ; and, secondly, between the powers exerted for their protection, and those employed by Satan for their overthrow. “ My Father which gave them me, is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.”

The latter of these comparisons, between the powers that are for us and against us, is the same with that instituted by St. Paul in the other passage above quoted ; and to this, the Apostle confines himself in that part of his epistle from which it is extracted. The thing which he proposes to establish, is the assertion contained in Rom. viii. 28. We know that all things work together for good to them that love God.” And to this, the conclusion of his argument in verse 31, strictly corresponds : which, in order to shew that he

conceived it to be established beyond the possibility of refutation, he proposes, in the form of a question; "What shall we say then to these things? If God be for us who can be against us?" And when, transported with the glorious subject, he proceeds, in a strain of pious exultation, to set in array all the forces of our spiritual adversary, demanding which of these shall be able to separate us from the love of Christ; it is not of the love we bear to Christ, of which he speaks; much less, is it the unalienableness of that affection, of which He is the object: but of the love which God bears to his obedient people; and the matchless power, exerted by him, to carry into effect, the purposes of his goodness towards them. The expression in the original is *τίς ἡμᾶς χωρίσει ἀπὸ τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ Χριστοῦ*; which would be an odd way of demanding, "how can we possibly fail in our love towards Christ?" or even, "who shall wring this love from our hearts." But no form of language can be more proper to express the demand, what power external to man himself, shall be able to wrest out of the protecting hand of God, the object of his love? shall tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, (he may well reply,) in all these things "we are more than conquerors through Christ that loved us," "for we know that all things work together for good to them that love God." That all the provisions of his wisdom in the arrangements of his Providence, are directed to this end; as it is elsewhere expressed by the same Apostle, when addressing the Christian converts, on the subject of their glorious privileges: "All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's^d."

^d 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.

We see then, how destitute of foundation the doctrine of indefectible grace; and this, without looking beyond the very passages adduced for its support. It is unnecessary to remark, that the places above referred to, and others which have been perverted to the same purpose, are in perfect harmony with those repeated admonitions respecting the danger of falling, and the necessity of vigilance and perseverance to the end. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall^e." "Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day^f." As also with the fearful declaration concerning the relapsed sinner, that "his last state shall be worse than the first^g."

How necessary these admonitions, we know from the numberless instances on record of the fatal effects of false security. And that there is nothing which contributes to produce this false security, more directly, or more powerfully, than the doctrine of indefectible grace, (if the tendency of this doctrine were not too apparent, to require an appeal to experience,) might be proved by the cases of profligate sinners, who have found in it, not the sanatives of grace, by which they might be roused to repentance; but the opiate to deaden the pangs of remorse.

It is recorded of Cromwell, that shortly before his dissolution, he enquired of his chaplain, whether it were possible for a person finally to fall, who had once been in a state of grace; and having received the wished-for answer, he added, "Then am I safe, for I am certain that I was once in that state."

If any thing could add to our abhorrence of these

^e 1 Cor. x. 12.

^f Ephes. vi. 13.

^g Luke xii. 26.

notions, of unconditional election, and indefectible grace; it would be the consideration, that they are the most fundamental doctrines of our holy religion, which have been perverted for their support: the doctrines respecting the efficacy of Christ's atoning sacrifice, and the natural disability and corruption of man.

It is said, that the sufferings and death of Christ, and the adequate fulfilment of the law in the person of him who is the federal head of the human race, is the adequate purchase of Salvation for the chief of sinners: that this is a finished work, to which nothing may be added. That any presumptuous notion of efficiency in our own efforts, being a clothing of filthy rags, and not of that wedding garment, in which those must appear who shall be accepted by him, is in itself, the most convincing proof of the want of faith. And in support of this statement, the last words of our dying Lord have been appealed to: but with what propriety, the expression "It is finished" can be adduced to verify this conception, is more than I can discover; the work which the Father had given him to do, during his personal abode on earth, was undoubtedly accomplished, when these words were uttered. That this work was not restricted to his last act of submission to the death on the cross, is plain from the words themselves, which indicate, that this was the conclusion or consummation of a work until that moment progressive. In this work, therefore, whatever he had antecedently taught or done, for the establishment of the Gospel, and his spiritual dominion on earth, was included; as well as this last act, of atonement, by which the whole was crowned and completed. But who can conclude from hence, that he had assigned no task to his subjects; or that no

injury is incurred by their failure in the performance ; or that a final relapse after a course of obedience, is rendered impossible ?

That Christ, by his incarnation, meritorious obedience, sufferings, and death, has opened unto us the gate of everlasting life, he cannot deserve the name of Christian who would deny : and that he qualifies us for this condition, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, working in us faith and repentance, and thereby turning us from sin to the living God, is a truth equally certain, and not less requisite for us to receive. To this last, the doctrine of unconditional election, as it is held by the Antinomians, is directly opposed : and to that apprehension and vigilance, so necessary to human frailty, and therefore, so generally and so earnestly recommended in Scripture, the Calvinistic doctrine of indefectible grace is, at least, unfriendly. It cannot be requisite, to insist further, on the absurdity of attempting to defend either of these kindred doctrines, by the words of our Lord now quoted.

The same doctrines of unconditional election and indefectible grace, have been grafted on that of the natural disability and corruption of man, and with no better success.

For it being admitted, that the natural man is not only destitute of the faculty of spiritual discernment, but unwilling to turn to the light of Divine truth ; it is thereupon asserted, that his condition is not merely that of spiritual weakness, but of spiritual death. In this state, he is compared to the dry and marrowless bones, before they had been quickened by the breath of the prophet, like them, also, to be awakened into life, by nothing short of the infusion of a new spirit from the

fountain of life itself. And it is further inferred from these admissions, that the all-powerful spirit of faith, can derive neither strength nor confirmation, from anything inherent in a being such as is here described; that bringing with it, its own perceptions and appetencies, it seeks no alliance with man's natural energies: that as the Grace of God is imparted freely and without any claim of merit on the part of man, so its work is perfected without his co-operation.

But surely, a doctrine is badly allied to Christianity, which, if admitted, renders all its precepts unmeaning and irrelevant: and no less so, those manifestations of God's mercies, which are so well fitted to fill the heart with the love of God; to move us to adore Him, and encourage us to live to Him. All these discoveries might as well have been withheld, if the performance of those duties, to which we are thereby excited, were of no benefit in the work of spiritual advancement. Indeed, on the supposition of unconditional election, all Revelation would be equally useless. In a transaction, which is altogether independent of the agency of man, he has no need to be informed or directed. But then, it is urged, that man is destitute of all spiritual vitality, by which he might co-operate with the Grace of God. Be it, that this is his condition by nature: yet when any measure of God's Spirit is communicated to him, is it a matter of indifference, whether the powers, so imparted, are exerted or not? Or is it forgotten, by those who regard the state of death as an image of that condition, that the principle of vitality which is infused into the natural body, requires itself to be sustained and invigorated, by the functions of the body which it quickens? There is a body as well as a soul in Reli-

gion ; and that body, is the system of its practical duties. These constituent parts of our Holy Religion, are vitally united by the wisdom of God ; their action is mutual, and their separation involves their common destruction. This is so in the present life, and we have no reason to think that it will be otherwise in the life to come.

It is in vain, therefore, that we have discarded the doctrine of the sufficiency of man's unaided powers, to satisfy the demands of Divine justice, and qualify him for the enjoyment of eternal life in the presence of God ; if we are to take refuge in a system, which leaves no room for his exertions in the work of spiritual advancement : for as the former doctrine is calculated to encourage a presumptuous self-dependence, in the highest degree hostile to the whole spirit of the Gospel ; so the latter representation, which refers us, for the ground of our hopes, to an unconditional election, is obviously calculated to lead to a misconception of the nature and the value of those means of grace, which God hath placed at our disposal ; and which, being the appointed vehicles of spiritual sustenance, are, to us who rightly apply them, the instruments of spiritual advancement.

What though it be stated, that the diligent use of those means by the faithful, is included in the original decree, by which they had been elected ; and that thus the operation of the appointed means may be admitted, without restricting, by any condition, the exercise of sovereign power ascribed to the Deity ? Is it not a restriction of the exertion of God's power, to maintain, that He has not endued any portion of his creation, with the faculty of self-determination ? And whilst the actions of his creatures are fixed by an immutable decree, is He not deprived of the objects for the exercise

of his justice; the accountable subjects of his moral government? By whom, then, are the attributes of the Supreme Being circumscribed? Is it not by those speculators in religious theories, who whilst they seem to be solicitous for the honour of God, would, in fact, limit the exercise of his power and wisdom, to the creation of passive instruments; and disallow his righteous government, by denying the existence of any beings, fitted to be the objects of his retributive justice?

But the present subject, leads us to consider the doctrine of unconditional election, only as it affects the mind in its application of the means appointed: and I think it must appear, that this doctrine, by which God is represented, as having withheld these things from our disposal, is, if not absolutely mischievous, at least highly perilous to the influence of Christianity in the regulation of our conduct. When it is supposed, that the glory of God is not sufficiently maintained, nor the condition of man, sufficiently humbled, by the admissions relative to his natural corruption, including his carnal disaffection and spiritual blindness, requiring not only an express revelation of the Divine will, but also the assistance of spiritual influences, to enable him to apprehend truly, and to entertain effectually, the matters revealed to him; and when, to help our conceptions of these matters, it is attempted, to regulate by an eternal and immutable decree, his choice in the acceptance, and his diligence in the use of the means by which his deliverance is to be effected; It may be fairly demanded, is this to remove our difficulties, or to create them? Is not the scheme of divinity offered for our acceptance, one, in which the famous dispute concerning liberty and necessity is boldly

decided? And are not the doctrines of the Gospel thrown into the mould of a metaphysical theory, the most abstruse that ever tortured the wit of man?

It is not my intention to follow an adversary into a retreat so remarkable for its obscurity: but surely it becomes us to consider, what direction or encouragement we derive from these persuasions, in the performance of our Christian duties. And here I think we must pause, before we declare in favor of an opinion which, whilst it presents us with no new motive of action, is calculated to free from all restraint, the operation of any motive by which we may have been already actuated, whilst we fancy that in the gratification of our desires we are impelled by an uncontrollable necessity.

Whoever feels that he is encouraged, by such considerations, to the diligent discharge of his Christian duties, (we humbly hope) will receive all the blessings attendant upon such a course, undiminished by any errors of speculation; but how dangerous it is to build, on these foundations, a system of practical religion for general use, will appear to any person, who calls to mind, the many acts of desperation and wickedness, to which, men in all ages, have been encouraged, by the persuasions of the impulses of an irresistible power.

Let such examples teach us, to distrust all those speculations, which would obscure the important truths of the Gospel. Whilst we deplore that inability and corruption of our common nature, which our philosophy had never suspected, let us admit that our agency is required, in carrying on the work of our own salvation; and whilst we acknowledge the source of those influences by which the spirit is converted towards God, let us not labour to efface the convictions he hath so

deeply wrought in us, that we are capable of obeying and cherishing, or of resisting and quenching, those suggestions and those lights, according to the use we make, of the means of grace, which he hath put into our possession.

Here there is no inconsistency : conceiving that the Divine communications are made to us, in the way of suggestion and representation; and gratefully receiving, as among the most precious gifts of God, the means whereby these impressions are to be cultivated and matured; our persuasions, so far from being opposed to each other, will afford mutual confirmation and support: we shall entertain such sentiments respecting the exercise of the Divine power, as must encrease our apprehensions of human responsibility; and such notions of the agency of man, as cannot fail to enlarge our conceptions of the goodness and providence of God.

The question with which we are at present principally concerned, relates to the original and progress of the principle of Christian Faith: that lively and habitual apprehension of the things of eternity, before which, the interests of the present state sink into comparative insignificance. And whilst we admit, that by our natural powers, we could never have attained to this knowledge of the things pertaining to our ulterior destination; that without the quickening influence of the Divine Spirit, shed abroad in our hearts, we should never have been awakened to a vital apprehension of their reality and glory when revealed; shall it derogate from the power or grace of God; to acknowledge that He hath placed in our hands, the instruments by which we may call down this fire from above? Whilst we look up to Him as the author and finisher of our faith; whilst

we attribute our views, our hopes, our resolutions, to the outflowings of Divine Grace ; how does it lessen the measure of our gratitude, or the sense of our dependence, to believe, that He hath committed to us the means by which they are appropriated by us, and confirmed to us? And is it too much to presume that whilst engaged in the discharge of the duties so assigned to us, the application of our faculties to the light of truth, shall be rewarded by an improvement of our capacity and our ability: that we shall proceed in our task with renovated strength, that new lights shall break in upon us and around us, that the fitness and congruity of parts in the scheme of salvation, shall become more apparent, and the various characters of Divine Truth more obvious and convincing; until that light, to which we had turned, as to the faint dawnings of the East, shall shine in those manifest glories, which leave no room for doubt or uncertainty?

Without pronouncing whether this is uniformly the process, by which, the spirit of man advances in the knowledge of Divine Truth ; I may be permitted to observe, that this mode of gradual enlargement, is perfectly analogous to the nature of our progress in all other intellectual acquirements. It is consonant to observation, that those who make the best use of their powers, and of the means by which they are exercised, shall proceed with renovated powers and increased facilities, towards further acquirements : nay, this seems to be the very truth inculcated by our blessed Lord by way of encouragement, when he assures us, that to Him that hath, shall be given more abundantly, but that, from him who is deficient (in the application of the

helps afforded) shall be taken, even that which remaineth ^h.

But whatever any person may think of this representation of the growth of Grace, he shall have no dispute with me; I presume not to set any measure to the bounties of the Creator, or to limit the methods of His Providence by any particular description. My purpose is merely to vindicate those doctrines which constitute the basis of all practical Religion; relative to the communications of God's free Spirit, and the responsibility of man, in the use of the means afforded for confirming him in the possession; and to protest against every system, which, by fixing our regards exclusively on either of these doctrines, must tend to weaken the practical efficacy of the other.

[E]

In the foregoing paragraph the words Conversion and Regeneration have been used indiscriminately; they are, however, somewhat different in signification, and the distinction may be worth attending to.

Regeneration denotes a change in the moral character of man: whereby, from having been an alien from God, and an enemy to his law, he is restored to his Image, and conformed to his Will. This change in the subject, in his views, affections, and dispositions, is ascribed to the agency of the Divine Spirit; and the work itself, is denoted in Scripture, by the names of a New Birth and New Creation.

Conversion, is the change of purpose consequent on this; and it implies that the mind is turned from its former engagements, into a course agreeable to the

^h Matt. xiii. 12.

Divine Will; as is evident from expressions such as, "repent and be converted", "sinners shall be converted unto Thee".

In both of these terms, it is implied, that the two conditions, that from which the individual is changed, and that into which he is brought, are widely distant from each other. But the change denoted by the word Regeneration, relates more particularly to his views, dispositions, and affections: that implied in the word Conversion, belongs to the active powers, exerted under the influence of religious impressions, or to the course of life, into which, he is thereby directed. Accordingly, whilst the latter term has been sometimes, though rarely, applied to believing Disciples, to denote a change yet to occur in them, as in the direction of our Lord to Peter; "when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren", we never find that the former term was applied by the Sacred Writers, to them, on any occasion, subsequent to their first introduction to Christianity. In our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus, on the subject of Spiritual Regeneration, the persons who undergo this change, are plainly specified in the following passage. "Verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God". Here, Regeneration, so far from being represented as a thing subsequent to their entrance into the kingdom of God, is distinctly referred to the sacramental ordinance of Baptism, rendered effective on the part of God, by the communications of his Holy Spirit. St. Paul, reproving the Corinthians for gross violations of the rules of Christian

¹ Acts iii. 19.

² Psalm li. 13.

³ Luke xxii. 32.

⁴ John iii. 5.

morality, does not tell them that they must be born anew: but he reminds them of the time in which they made a profession of Christianity, as that in which this change had occurred; requiring of them now to walk in a manner worthy of that profession. "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of our Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God".

To this change, which accompanied the first profession of the Gospel, the terms *Regeneration* and *new Birth* have been consecrated by the writers of the Holy Scriptures; and adhering closely to these guides, the framers of our Liturgy have never ventured on the use of these expressions, except in the administration of *Baptism*.

But modern Sectaries have not been so scrupulous. The value of these terms was too obvious to escape their notice: and accordingly we find them applied by every Cast, to denote the adoption of its distinctive Tenets. Popery, therefore, is not the only scheme of Religion, which maintains itself by practising on the fears of mankind. In threatening with the terrors of damnation, all who presume to question its authority in matters of Faith or Discipline, it does no more than the modern Sectary, who regards the adoption of his own particular views and cant, as the profession of the Gospel. To this change, which is frequently but a thin disguise, if indeed it be a disguise, of the unreformed corruptions of human nature, he applies exclusively the benefits of the Christian dispensation. With him, new proselytes to his sect, are new converts to the Faith; and Christians newly born.

The disgusting hypocrisy, which, under such a mask,

^a 1 Cor. vi. 11.

would impose itself on the world for superior sanctity, has done more to injure the power of Religion, than all the direct attacks of its avowed enemies. In this observation, I mean not to include the Author of the System of Theology: of his personal character I know nothing: his work displays considerable ability, deep reflection, and extensive knowledge of the Scriptures; but it appears to me, that by maintaining that the work of Regeneration is instantaneous, and applying the term to those who have already made a sincere profession of Christianity, he has lent his name, rendered respectable by eminent qualifications, to the artifices and presumption here complained of.

DISCOURSE V.

ON THE VALUE OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, AS MEANS
OF GRACE.

JOHN vi. 63.

*The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit, and
they are Life.*

IN the prosecution of the plan of these discourses, I would now direct your attention, to the means entrusted to man, by which he is enabled to maintain a communication with his Maker.

The efficient cause of all blessings whatever, and more especially of the greatest of all blessings, those which prepare the way to everlasting life ; is God alone : this is certain ; but it is equally certain, that in the usual dispensations of his providence, his blessings are conveyed to us by established means ; that many of those means have been placed at the disposal of man himself ; and that in the diligent use of them, he is to seek the advantages which have been promised.

In placing the Holy Scriptures at the head of the appointed means of grace, we only follow the instructions of their Divine Author. The passage quoted in the text, is but one of the many places in which they are so exhibited ; and in supporting their claim to this distinction, by further citation, the only difficulty, is that of selection, where the declarations on this head are so numerous and direct. The following, taken indiscriminately, may suffice as a specimen.

Thus the Gospel is declared to be “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth^a.” It is, therefore, among the chief of those means, whereby the power of God is applied to us, for directing us into the way of salvation. “Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Holy Scriptures might have hope^b.” Here it is declared, that the Holy Scriptures, are the means of spiritual consolation ; and of hope, which is the anticipation of future happiness. “The Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart^c.” Here it is, in the hands of God, the most efficacious instrument, by which he cuts away all the impurities

^a Rom. i. 16.

^b Rom. xv. 4.

^c Heb. iv. 12.

of the human heart. Nor is this the only place where this figure is employed by the Apostle, to convey his sense of the efficacy of this instrument of grace. He tells us again, that the Word of God, is the sword of His Spirit^d.

Again, the Holy Scriptures are represented as the means of bringing us to a state, which, contrasted with that of our minds by nature, as to views, affections, and inclinations, is designated as a new existence: thus it is said of God, that “of his own will begat he us with the Word of Truth^e.” And of the converts to Christianity, that they are “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God^f.” Again, the Word of God is compared, by our Lord, to the seed of the husbandman, which, unless it is sown in a good heart, and tended diligently, will bring forth no fruit to perfection. And in a figure somewhat similar, we are required by the Apostle to “receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save our souls^g.” By another, it is said to be the word of life: that is, the word, by which, spiritual life is conveyed into the human soul. And another insists on the value of the instructions thereby conveyed to us, as the means of conforming us to the will of God, by faith, which is the principle of obedience: and on our need of these instructions, the subject being that

^d Ephes. vi. 17.

^e James i. 18.

^f 1 Pet. i. 23.

^g James i. 21.

which had, for ever, eluded man's unassisted reason.

"Now to him that is of power, to establish you, according to my Gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest ; and by the Scriptures of the Prophets, according to the commandment of God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith ; to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ ^h."

In attempting to form some estimate, of the value of these discoveries, it will be necessary to help our conceptions, by comparing our condition, with that of others who have been less favored in this respect. But it is not by a comparison with the Jews, that we can form an adequate conception of the elevation on which we are placed. The light of prophecy, by which they should have discerned the nature and greatness of their deliverance, was obscured indeed by national prejudices ; but independently of this, they enjoyed unspeakable advantages above the Gentile world, who were allowed to maintain their unequal conflict by the unaided powers of natural reason. If we demand what were the advantages of their condition, who missed the main object to which they were directed ; the Apostles supplies the answer, " much every way, chiefly because unto them were committed the

^h Rom. xvi, 25—27.

oracles of God¹." These oracles comprised many things, which lying on the very surface, could not have been misapprehended by them : they were thereby, expressly instructed as to the being of God, the unity of his nature, his power, his goodness, his all-disposing providence : they were taught that the world was created by him : that man, made by him in his own image, had fallen, through disobedience, into a state of sin and misery, from which they were taught to expect a final deliverance ; at least, for their own people : that, in the mean time, a moral law had been promulgated by God himself, which should be sufficient to uphold them, until the fulness of time, when they should be delivered from the bondage of the Law, and put in possession of an inheritance subject to no earthly casualty.

Thus instructed in the elementary doctrines of Revelation, they were brought to the foot of the Mount on which God had descended. But to form a true estimate of the height to which he hath raised us, above the natural condition of man, we must view it from a different position : we must compare the light, imparted by the Gospel, with the faint and dubious indications of reason, to which the mass of mankind had been consigned. By such a comparison, we shall soon perceive how little we owe to human philosophy :

¹ Rom. iii. 2.

how true the declaration, that “the world by wisdom knew not God^k.” And to give to human reason every advantage it can possess, we shall not suppose a human being, so besotted by dissipation, entrammelled by worldly occupations, or fettered by slavish necessities, as to be prevented from rising occasionally above this thralldom, to look beyond him and about him. We have before us the exertions of human reason, possessing every advantage of natural vigor improved by erudition : and therefore, without arrogating too much, we may undertake to appreciate the extent of its powers, when exercised on questions of the highest concern ; such as the nature of God, the present condition, and future destination of man. We can imagine, for we have seen, the heathen philosopher engaged in such enquiries ; and we know how limited the extent of those discoveries, on which he could rely with reasonable assurance.

I speak not now of those, who misapprehended the indications of superior wisdom and goodness which the frame of nature, every where, presents ; though these were not few in number, nor without distinction, in the annals of philosophy. Nor of those who, by perverted inclinations and evil habits, viewed these subjects through a false medium ; being incapable of ac-

^k 1 Cor. i. 21.

knowledging any good, but that which favoured their voluptuousness or ambition: but of those, who with singleness of mind, and application united to the vast importance of the subject, undeviatingly explored their way, to the utmost limits discoverable by human faculties.

Such a person would not fail to discern, in every thing around him, the characters of superior power and intelligence. In every avenue in which his thoughts are directed, he, no less than our first Parents, in the walks of Eden, is accompanied by the all-wise and all-powerful Artificer. He discerns his providence, as if admitted into his counsels, and acknowledges the munificence, of which he is himself the chief object.

But, farther than this, when he seeks a more intimate knowledge of the nature of the Being, by whom he is environed and protected; to discover whether he is Himself, distinct from the system of nature on which he operates, or the informing Spirit, imparting life and motion to the material world, as to his bodily frame; whether he is the Creator of the universe, or only the Architect, by whom it had been fashioned, out of materials co-eternal with himself: whether he has any further purpose in the formation of this theatre of nature, than to serve as a habitation, furnished with the means of enjoyment for his sentient creatures; and what is that purpose? If this be his main design, why is toil and misery

so often the lot of its inhabitants? Why is disease and death, permitted to make such havoc, under the eye of the Sovereign Power himself? Why is a scene generally so fair tarnished with any admixture of evil? And how comes it that virtue frequently bears so large a portion of human misery? Does the God of nature hold only a divided empire? And is his beneficent hand controuled by an equally powerful principle of evil? These are some of the difficulties which present themselves to him who, by the force of unassisted reason, endeavours to explore the nature and the purposes of the great Being in whose hands he is: and the more he applies himself to such enquiries, the more he is convinced, that he is surrounded with difficulties which elude his keenest research.

Turning from God to man himself, do we in the person of the philosopher consider by what accident, (if we are pleased to give it that name,) we now exist? That though time has been flowing on from all eternity, and must continue to flow without end or limit; yet here we are, in the occupation of the present moment,—a moment so soon to pass away, and together with it all the advantages we now enjoy? This surely affords matter of admiration, though persuaded that our being were terminated by the present life: but if not so assured, the considerations it suggests are truly awful and awakening.

Again, we have reason to believe, that the universe is extended beyond the scope of the most excursive imagination, including worlds without number, like to this we inhabit: how comes it that we are confined to this particular corner? If it is by chance, how many chances against this particular situation? Is this our prison-house, or our school of discipline—the abode of our ephemeral beings, the tomb of our existence, and our hopes?

We perceive that we are here surrounded by numberless species; the inhabitants of the earth; the air, the waters: that we belong to that species, which exercises dominion over all the other families of the earth; enjoying not only powers of body and faculties of sense as they; but of forethought and reflection, which seem to be more sparingly imparted to the rest. Whence is this? how came we into this situation? Why thus endowed? by what power and for what end? Is it for future happiness or misery? for exaltation or degradation? or is the present state introductory to nothing further; and is the moment of death that of our spiritual annihilation? “Not knowing who sent us hither,” (I quote the words of an eminent Christian philosopher *,) “not knowing who sent us hither, or for what purpose, or whither we are going; we are struck with dismay, as if we should find ourselves in some deso-

* Paschal.

late island, not knowing how to escape ; acquiescence, composure, and self-complacency, in such circumstances, were ignorance and stupidity : what though we perceive around us others alike ignorant of themselves, who espying certain objects of pleasure, set themselves down to enjoyment ; this is no relief to our anxieties, no encouragement to our apprehensions ; they cannot ward off the stroke of death. We must die alone, and therefore we should live as alone."

As we change our view, from our external condition, to our internal constitution ; we are conscious of mental powers, carrying us even to the throne of God, yet baffled by the smallest insect or the most insignificant atom ; aspirings, to immortality and glory, which nothing created can arrest or satisfy, and the humiliation, which belongs to degrading necessities, and yet viler appetites ; capabilities for the most exalted virtues, blended with those frailties, which yield to the most destructive passions. Viewed on the one side, man seems to claim an alliance with something superhuman ; on the other side, we behold him, debased to the condition of the very lowest order of reptiles.

In fact the line of existence, with which human nature communicates, is of such vast extent, that reason can apprehend it only by portions, and these so small, that as it directs its views, above or below, it contemplates man as the companion

of God, or of the beasts that perish. Accordingly whilst some have regarded human nature, as an emanation from the Deity himself; others, limiting their attention to another view of the picture, have placed human happiness in animal satisfactions.

This opens an extensive field of most interesting enquiry: for what end such a being was created, and how is he to be disposed of? Is there any sequel to the present life, and if so, in what condition shall he re-appear, whether of happiness or misery? In his present state of helplessness and ignorance what exertions can he make, to secure the one, or escape the other? These are questions suggested by no idle curiosity: they relate to his deepest interests; to uncertainties the most agitating and appalling. Reason is sufficient to suggest these enquiries, but where shall we seek the satisfaction we so earnestly desire? How should we esteem the hand which would uplift the veil, and set before our eyes the scene on which we are so soon to enter; and if our future condition is in any way connected with our present endeavours, how earnestly should we covet that instruction, which might direct those endeavours; that supply of strength which should carry us through every difficulty, and that guidance which might secure us from every danger?

It is in vain that we apply to philosophy, to

release us from these perplexities. The conjectures of the wisest, (and they are nothing but conjectures) are vague and contradictory ; and the prospects they have imagined, are so variously tinged by hope or apprehension, like those of the promised land as reported by the spies of the Israelites, that the enquiring mind, unanswered and unsatisfied, baffled and amazed, collapses into the inaction of despair, or seeks relief from such distractions, in the fictions of vulgar superstition.

The condition, which we have endeavoured to represent, is no idle fancy ; it was the condition of the heathen world, before they had been enlightened by revelation : it is still the condition of no inconsiderable portion of the human race ; and, but for the peculiar favor of God, it should now be our own. Had we still wandered in the mazes of human philosophy, with those wonderful men, who have laboured, though in vain, by unassisted reason, to explore the regions of futurity, and to catch some glimpse, however faint, of man's ulterior destination : had we fancied, with Zeno, a theory of absorption in the first cause ; or a transmigration with Pythagoras ; still we should be conscious, that this was all but ingenious conjecture ; that possibly, at least, the real disposition of things may be different.

But let us not suppose, my friends, that these speculations, however unsatisfactory, are alto-

gether without their use. It would seem, that God had left human reason, for a while, to itself, in order that by the absolute failure of its proudest efforts, we becoming conscious of our utter inability to grapple with the subject, might be able to estimate the value of those discoveries He hath made to us in his Holy Word.

Reason, which discovers no solid foundation of hope, must necessarily fail, in discovering the adequate scope and efficient motive of human exertions. Let us consider the character of its moral instructions in this point of view : such a survey, however superficial, will, I doubt not, bring home to our apprehensions the same important truth, that when "the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe".^a

Now, as we consider the constitution of man's nature, the truth which first offers itself to our notice, is that his original propensities, those which first discover themselves, and which however afterwards disguised and modified, continue to be the mainsprings of all his actions, are of the lowest character. With respect to his original appetites, he is placed on a level with the meanest inhabitants of the earth; from this condition, indeed, he seems to emerge, as his intellectual powers are developed: his larger apprehension of the sources from whence he may derive his animal satisfactions, and of that wide range of

^a 1 Cor. i. 21.

means and measures by which his ends are to be compassed, teaches the practical lessons of self-command, not only in the patient exertion of his physical powers, but in the more important business of self-restraint, by foregoing present indulgence with a view to future advantages ; whilst the obvious necessity of conciliating the favor of others, as the means of securing those interests, leads to the cultivation of many of the social virtues. All this is admirably calculated to raise him above the condition of the brutes, whose appetites are restrained by no apprehension of distant consequences. Thus his sense of his interests teaches him to keep in subjection his animal appetites ; and his regard to public estimation, confines him, in the prosecution of his interests, to that course, which is consistent with the general welfare. Still however, his views terminate in the present life ; and if he is rendered sagacious by this discipline, it is only to provide for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof. The image of death will indeed sometimes break in on his fancy, to convince him of the vanity of his pursuits, to perplex his judgment and confound his calculations ; but this not presenting any object to his ambition, is soon dissipated ; and when he returns to his former pursuits, it is rarely found, that his ardour has suffered any abatement.

Such is the general character of the views of unassisted reason ; and such the ends to which it

would direct our exertions: but in the progress of civilization, these have been much diversified; and the principles of conduct, selected or modelled, by reference to these ends, were, accordingly, as variable as the nature and extent of the interests to be secured.

In the earlier periods of the history of man, his mode of living being as yet simple, and his wants limited to the mere necessities of existence, the circle of his duties were comprized within a few obvious maxims: when his mind, not as yet trammelled by the engagements of civilized life, had lost nothing of its original ferocity, and when, the means of personal security not being as yet provided, all things yielded to the superiority of force; at this period of his history, the qualities of most importance in offensive and defensive warfare, would be those in greatest demand; and accordingly we find, that to bodily strength, and intrepidity of spirit, were annexed the highest rewards of popular estimation. Nay, we learn that the admiration of society had been then so exclusively engrossed by this quality of personal courage, that even in the more advanced stages of refinement, when the multiplication of men's relations had also enlarged the sphere of their moral duties, the word virtue still continued to be its specific and peculiar appellation.

In the progress of civilization, the mass of society necessarily became subdivided into a

variety of classes, distinguished by that of their conditions ; and, accordingly, whilst the several ranks of a community, were to be held together by certain maxims of general application, the law of opinion was as diversified as the pursuits which were to be regulated, or the nature of the intercourse to be maintained. Thus whilst the condition of the poor man, engrossed by the cares of a mercenary occupation, is necessarily unfavorable to the acquirement or display of any splendid qualification, the rule of conduct prescribed by public opinion, would scarcely extend beyond matters of prime necessity ; whilst in that rank, in which the intercourse is of a nature more intellectual, the moral qualifications of men would be rated by a much higher standard ; and the principle of veracity, together with the virtues of self-command ; the subjugation, at least the concealment, of many of the selfish affections, particularly of obtrusive vanity, or overbearing pride, would be regarded, as indispensably requisite, rather than eminently praiseworthy.

In the written systems of positive laws a similar limitation is observable ; the views of the legislator extend not beyond the boundaries of his particular country, and attention to general morality is enforced, only so far as it may appear conducive to political prosperity. Beyond these limits he sees but the stranger, whom he regards

with indifference, or the enemy who is the object of his fear or resentment.

The moral philosopher rises, indeed, above these distinctions of place and climate, to comprehend in one extensive family, all the nations of the earth, and to develop the laws which are necessary to secure such an extended co-operation ; his views are therefore the most extensive, to which the unaided mind can attain ; his principles are the dictates of enlightened reason, supported by the most enlarged experience of the wants and weakness, the interests and the powers of the species. Accordingly his efforts and his discoveries are to be treated with respect. Revelation itself warrants this : it was given not to supersede the use of our faculties, but to supply their imperfections ; and if the circle of duties it prescribes, were to be comprehended within a single precept, that comprehensive precept, would direct us to use the lights within us, for every purpose to which they will serve.

Nor do we give little credit to philosophy, when we acknowledge, that having, beforehand, felt our way, it shews its particular bearings and general direction ;—that it confirms the lessons of experience, by tracing them to their first principles, and applies these principles to the development of the system of our moral duties. Its efforts have been uniformly directed, to establish

the subordination of the interests of the individual to those of the public ; and to raise the mind, from considerations of private ends, to views of general happiness : and though it does not always succeed in placing clearly before the mind, the connexion of the interests of the individual with those of the public, yet, as in science, men are wont to give to their speculations, an extension, beyond the cases, by which they are actually supported ; so morals also have their sublimities, and our approbation of a principle, recommended by the general usefulness of its application, is required even in cases where it may be difficult to support it by adequate enforcements.

Such are the efforts of the moralist to connect the individual with the entire species, and to extend his views beyond the contracted sphere of self-interest, to the public welfare. This, however, though an important step in the progress of the human mind, establishes no exception to the remark, that the ends as well as the motives of conduct, discoverable by unassisted Reason, are all comprised within the present stage of existence.

Whatever variety, therefore, may exist among the systems of moral duty, as to the extent of the objects they embrace, or the motives they supply, the same defect is inherent in all ; it lies deep, and at the foundation of every plan devised by man's unaided wisdom : his views all terminate

in the present life ; or if, at any time, his attention is directed to a future state, it is, merely, by way of supplement, to the sanctions which he is able to apply, for the enforcement of those rules of conduct, by which the interests of this world are secured or promoted ; to provide some further restraints of the selfish affections from whose inconsistent claims, and lofty pretensions, proceeds every species of mutual hostility ; some methods of drawing more closely the bonds of society, and of securing that co-operation among its members, which experience proves to be absolutely requisite to the attainment of almost every worldly advantage. Religion is cultivated as it can be made subservient to his present well-being ; its terrors, hopes, and consolations, he applies exclusively to this purpose, like the traveller, who returns from a foreign country, to improve his condition, with enjoyments which he could not have extracted from his native soil.

It is in vain that the whole frame of nature disclaims this order ; in vain does it proclaim to the mind of man, that the present is but a state of education for a future existence : in vain it is, that this truth is suggested by the unequal distribution of the goods of fortune : in vain that the successive stages of infancy and maturity, by the closeness of analogy, offer it to his imagination : his unassisted reason discovering no-

thing palpable or impressive, beyond the limits of the present scene, is unequal to the task of disengaging the affections from the objects by which he is so urgently solicited ; and these remaining unchanged, it can propose nothing further, than the removal of impediments to the co-operation of individuals, by adjusting their pretensions and regulating their pursuits.

There is, however, a wide distinction between imperfection and falsehood. The discoveries of reason, though limited, are true, and its practical instructions, though deficient in power, are nevertheless useful. From it we learn the first lessons of self-government, and though it proposes no fundamental change in the objects of our desires ; yet in attempting to regulate competition, it discovers and displays the value of the principles of veracity and justice : affording enlightened views of self-interest, it combines the exertions of men for their common advantage : to supply the defect of its sanctions, it sends us to Religion ; thereby familiarizing the apprehension of God and a future existence, and preparing the way for the fuller discoveries of Revelation.

The indications, therefore, of reason are not only true, but valuable, for the purposes to which they have been applied, the well-being of the present life. Farther than this, we cannot extend our commendation, having already seen how

insufficient it is to guide the spirit of man on his way to his final destination.

The discoveries, which are available for this purpose, are made to us in the Word of God ; and that we might be able to form some estimate of their immense importance, we have endeavoured to place ourselves in the situation of those on whom the light of Gospel Truth breaks forth, for the first time, when having been vainly exercised in such enquiries, they have become duly sensible of the darkness by which they are surrounded, and are prepared to hail the day-spring from on high, by which it is dispelled. How satisfactory, how glorious the light which the Holy Scriptures send out upon them ! The clouds which surrounded the throne of that mysterious Being, who was so long and so vainly sought, are here withdrawn ; and God himself is manifested to the view of mortal man, not as human imagination would have presented him, controuled by fate, or contending with the elements of nature, the materials of his skill or the copartners of his authority ; but spiritual, impassive, eternal, unchangeable.—The Creator of all things in Heaven and Earth, pervading all things, sustaining all things,—His power uncontroulable, His wisdom all-searching, His purposes from everlasting.

From the contemplation of such a Being, the mind of man might shrink, as being too abstract

for his imagination, too vast for the grasp of his comprehension ; nor would he feel himself attracted to a God so highly exalted above the concerns of such a creature as man : for such He would seem to the eye of the speculative philosopher who arrives at his notions of the Divine Nature, by separating from the attributes of power and wisdom, all the weaknesses and imperfections incident to humanity. The holiness and righteousness in which He discovers himself, place Him in a nearer relation to us, only to render the representation more awful and more alarming. Conscious of our weakness and unworthiness, how shall we place ourselves beneath His eye who is too pure to behold iniquity ? In vain therefore, would God have manifested himself to us, had the representation closed here ; but such is not the case ; the very attributes which are most requisite for our encouragement, are those which He has placed most fully in our view. The character in which He delights to be contemplated, is that of goodness and of mercy over all His works ; in nature resembling, though in measure far exceeding, the purest and strongest affections of the human breast.

The discoveries are not less important or decisive, which are made to us on the other subjects of our enquiries ; the nature and destination of man himself, his business in the present life, and the aids with which he is furnished for the per-

formance of the task assigned him. These two parts of the exhibition relating to the characters of God and man, must be viewed in connexion, being requisite, each to the impressiveness of the other. To us whose judgments are founded in comparison and contrast, the power and holiness of God, is requisite to impart a sense of human weakness and corruption : and the misery of man, to exhibit the overflowing mercy of God, by furnishing the subject on which it is exercised.

But how shall we venture to hold up the corruption and weakness of man, in the light which is shed from the unclouded holiness of God ? Suffice it to say, that we should behold a Being, who deceiving and deceived, combines in his character whatever is odious in the sight of his Creator ; contracted affections, depraved appetites, ferocious passions, corrupted principles ;—the arrogance of pretension, without any character of goodness ;—the thirst of power, without the faculty of self-government ;—the pride of self-sufficiency in the most unqualified dependence, not only on his fellow mortals, but even on the elements of senseless matter ;—a total alienation from the life of God, in whose image he was created, and by whose sustaining and protecting power he is environed and supported.

And what can be the destination of a being such as this ? “ O ! the depth of the riches both

of the wisdom and power of Godⁿ !” The prospects of eternity are opened before him, together with the counsels of the Omnipotent for his Redemption and Salvation. By the light of the Christian Revelation, he discovers the ocean in whose immensity the stream of time shall be swallowed up. By that light which has been shed from above, his views are extended to the heights of Heaven, and to the depths of Hell ; the one illumined by the immediate presence of God, the other receding, immeasurably, from the Fountain of Life, into the depths of misery, and the darkness of despair. Thereby he perceives, that the happiness of this endless existence, shall consist in his affiliation by the great Author of his existence : his misery in alienation and abnegation from the same origin of life and power : and whilst the latter is the condition to which he is rapidly advancing of his own free will, and the former is inaccessible to man, though aided by every power short of that of God himself, he learns that the exertion of this power, in all its plenitude, is obtained for him by the mediation of Christ, interposing, not only to avert the course of vindictive justice, but to direct on human weakness the purifying streams which issue from the inexhaustible fountain of Divine Love.

When to this glorious view of our promised exaltation, and to this discovery of the depth of that

ⁿ Rom. xi. 33.

misery from which we are delivered, we add the immensity of the sacrifice by which this change in our condition is effected; when we consider that it is for us, whose obstinate rebellion, had perverted into curses, the blessings which flow from the Providence of God; and to redeem us from the power of the enemy, to whom we had delivered ourselves, that a Saviour has been provided from whose redeeming love, neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us; the labouring faculties of the soul, turning from a scheme of mercy, which fills the Heavens with astonishment, to the contemplation of its own unworthiness, is prompted to shrink back and exclaim with the Psalmist, "Lord what is man, that thou hast such respect unto him, or the son of man, that thou so regardest him."

It is needless to observe, how far these discoveries extend beyond even the most uncertain conjectures of philosophy. But were it only to confirm the dubious indications of human reason, still how great would be the benefit of such a Revelation? It is true, indeed, that God had never left Himself without a witness. "The works of His creation retain the stamp of Him who wrought them, and He has intimated to human reason so much of the probability of a future

existence, as sufficed, occasionally, to disturb the satisfactions we might have sought in the present. But it is in His word, that He has spoken to us plainly of His own nature and of ours, and of the purposes of His Grace towards us. In his visible Creation you may discover some traces of these things, but yourselves are the interpreters. In His word He speaks plainly and for Himself: "did you know the gift of God, and who it is that speaketh to you." Did you know the gift of Eternal Life, and that it is the Lord of Heaven and Earth who hath condescended to address you on this subject, with what awe would you not approach that Sacred Volume! If Moses took off his shoes, on perceiving the indications of God's more immediate presence, with what Holy dread should you divest yourselves of all that is low and carnal when listening to the same voice speaking to you in the Scriptures?

But God hath not only manifested his purposes with respect to his erring creatures, and the powers He hath Himself exerted for their accomplishment, but also that which, it concerns us no less to know; our business in this world, the part which has been assigned to us in the advancement of this wondrous scheme, and the means submitted to our disposal.

Viewed in the Light of the Gospel Revelation, the world we inhabit is the school of our discipline, and all the duties consequent on the rela-

tions of society, are, to him who discharges them in the spirit of filial obedience, the means of spiritual advancement. Nay, all the occurrences of this life, are to him who profits by them according to the will of God, the medicinal, though frequently the bitter waters which flow from the same wellspring of Eternal Life, and "blessed is the man who, passing through the vale of Baca, makes it a well." "He shall go on from strength to strength," and the pools are filled with such waters;" or as it is elsewhere expressed, "all things work together for good to them that love God."^p "All things are His, whether life or death, or things present, or things to come, and he is Christ's and Christ is God's^q."

Thus whilst the true principles of moral science, lay beyond the scope of unassisted reason, its discoveries resembled a few detached cases of an extensive but as yet undiscovered theorem. It remained for the Christian Revelation to exhibit the luminous principle commensurate to the entire truth; to combine, to illustrate, and enforce those principles of moral duty, which had been so faintly discerned and so imperfectly established. From it we learn that the happiness here attainable is not the end on which our views should ultimately rest; that the life to come, is not a mere appendix to the present, for

^p Psalm lxxxiv. 6, 7.

^p Rom. viii. 28.

^q 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

completing a system of moral government apparently so imperfect. The whole order is now reversed, and we are, at length, instructed to regard the world we inhabit, not as a place of rest, but as a theatre of discipline, wherein the qualifications are to be acquired for an eternal hereafter. And of him who has entered on such a course, it is said, that all things are his, "whether life or death, or things present, or things to come," every effect of almighty power, every arrangement of an all-disposing Providence.

All things are, in the truest sense, his who applies them to the greatest advantage: his, therefore, they are, in the highest sense, to whom they become the means of advancement to a blessed immortality: to this end all the occurrences of human life are, under the directions of our Divine Instructor, eminently conducive: even its vexations, troubles, and disappointments, are applicable to this purpose, by furnishing the occasions for the exercise of patience, of contentedness, of submission to the will of God and of overflowing charity to our fellow mortals, in the forgiveness of injuries they may have inflicted. Nay, the calamities incident to our present condition, become the means of cultivating those Christian virtues, the harvest which, he that is above all, delights to gather, and which is fre-

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 22.

quently more abundant, when the seed is plowed deep into our hearts, and watered with our tears.

Such are the views which the Scriptures afford us relative to the interests, the hopes, and the business of mankind: but how much more will unfold itself, as the mind engaged by its representations is more and more enlightened by the Spirit of Truth!

The economy of grace, which is the subject of that Revelation, is strictly parallel to that of nature, which has been offered to our observation. The characters of goodness, wisdom, and power, which belong to both, are truly inexhaustible. In the study of both, therefore, there is room for endless progress. In both, much of difficulty will continue to present itself, and much of mystery, to which the powers of the human mind, are confessedly inadequate: but for the purpose of spiritual sustenance, there is abundance of celestial food on the very surface, which may be gathered by the most unskilful; much more of what is highly conducive to spiritual edification and comfort may be reached by patient industry, aided by previous cultivation; and it would seem, from a view of the subjects which bold and curious minds have vainly attempted, that in setting limits to our discoveries, the Deity hath only withheld the encouragements of human pride and presumption.

We cannot then refuse to admit that the Sacred

Volume, in which his Holy Spirit addresses us on subjects of the deepest interest, presents to us the most direct and efficient means of communicating with that Holy Spirit, and of approaching to the source of all those heavenly influences, whereby our souls are to be renovated and exalted; enriched with the fructifying principles, and finally established in the secure possession, of life eternal.

What then becomes of the doctrine according to which man would seem to have no part whatever in the work of his own advancement; by which, the scheme of salvation is so represented, as if every thing were done without him; nothing within him or by him? To a plan of irrespective election and absolute decrees, the means of grace would seem to be an unmeaning addition and a useless incumbrance. According to this scheme the Bible might, indeed, be reduced to a single sentence declaratory of the atonement. Nay, even this notification of the Divine mercy, might be dispensed with; and he that said, let there be light, and there was light; let there be a firmament, and it was so, might have said, let man be made a denizen of heaven, and man should have found himself an angel of light, exempt from all the dangers attendant on the misapplication of the opportunities afforded him for the attainment of that condition.

Why his Creator has not treated him in this

manner, is not given to us to know, neither is it for us to speculate on such matters. But from the consideration of the means of spiritual advancement with which man is provided, it is plain that the plan of salvation is not of this nature. This also we may know, that those aids by which he is enabled to rise to a condition so far above the reach of his natural powers, have not been obtruded on him, so as to violate his liberty as a moral agent: that they are such as may be neglected, and effectually resisted by him in the exercise of his moral freedom: but that if diligently sought after, for the direction of his views and the regulation of his conduct, he is permitted to hope, that the measure of the Divine assistance, will continue to be augmented, to the full extent of his spiritual capabilities.

If you have followed me in these reflections, on the value of this Repository of the Treasures of Divine Grace, with what gratitude should you not acknowledge the peculiar mercies of God, by which you are placed in a condition so eminently favourable to the attainment of all saving knowledge? That you are not, at this moment, exiles from the kingdom of God, in a land of ignorance and barbarism, on which the Gospel has not shed its sacred light, or where that light has been clouded by the errors of vulgar superstition.

That you dwell not in a land where access is

denied to the uncorrupted fountains of living waters. Where the authority of religion is maintained only as it may be perverted to the purposes of fraud, and its power understood, only as it may be applied in support of the claims of secular ambition.

In the country of your birth, the most effectual provisions have been made to guard the Holy Scriptures from such profanations : for this purpose the Word of Truth has been embodied in the service of our National Church ; whereby the light and spirit of the Christian Revelation is diffused through all its institutions and formularies of devotion : and the purity of the faith is secured from the possibility of corruption on the part of its constituted guardians.

These are among the many signal advantages, which are here most fully enjoyed by the Church of Christ. It were well, my friends, that our attention were seriously and frequently turned to these things ; persuaded, as we should be, that with the enlargement of our opportunities, the sphere of our duty is also extended ; and that which opens to us the means of higher advancement, discovers the danger of more deep destruction ; for, assuredly uncommon privileges and extraordinary assistance, if we do not avail ourselves of them to secure our acceptance, will but augment the severity of our condemnation : “ for to whom much is given, of him also much shall be required.”

DISCOURSE VI.

ON THE RULES OF INTERPRETATION TO BE
APPLIED TO THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

2 PETER iii. 15, 16.

Account that the long suffering of our Lord is Salvation, even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you, as also in all his Epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things, hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

THE foregoing admonition evidently appears to have been occasioned by the misinterpretation of the writings of St. Paul, on the subject of the long suffering of God : yet as it is not limited to this particular doctrine, nor to the writings of this Apostle, I shall consider it, as it is extended by the writer, to the whole body of the Scriptures; my object, in what follows, being to assist you with some general observations relative to the rules of interpretation, rather than to canvass any

of those doctrines by which the Church of Christ has been divided.

I would premise, my friends, that this is not the only admonition we have received, relative to the divisions and heresies by which the unity of the faith was to be disturbed. The same Apostle warns us against "false teachers who privily shall bring in damnable heresies^a." St. John, to the same effect, writes to the Church "let that therefore abide in you which you have had from the beginning; if that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son and in the Father^b." Such also is the adjuration of St. Paul to the Church at Corinth, "I beseech you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together, in the same mind, and in the same judgment^c." With no less earnestness he exhorts the Church at Ephesus, to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;" that they be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." Shewing them that Christ, in his provident care of his Church, had for their security placed over them instructors of different orders and in different offices, "giving some apostles and some prophets,

^a 2 Peter ii. 1. ^b 1 John ii. 24. ^c 1 Cor. i. 10.

and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers ^d.”

How well would it be for the cause of Christianity, had these injunctions been more attended to ! But some there are, who esteem it a particular merit, to withdraw from the Church under whose instructions they have been educated, and run after new doctrines ; as if every innovation were an indication of superior knowledge, and that the vacillating motions of their own minds, were an actual progress towards the end of their calling. Such would do well to reflect on the foregoing admonitions, and particularly that quoted in the text, in which they will find, that the Apostle speaking of the Holy Scriptures, in relation to the difficulties which belong to their style or matter, treats them merely as the occasion of error, and refers us for its efficient cause, to the characters of the expositors ; declaring that they are the unlearned and unstable who wrest them to their own destruction.

Here are two causes of schism, to which our attention is directed : the want of the qualifications of erudition, which are requisite for interpreting the word of God, and that instability of character, manifested by him whose opinions the general tenor of Scripture cannot fix, and whose presumption, the awful importance of the subject cannot repress.

^d Ephes. iv. 14, 11.

Such, in the estimation of the Apostle, is he who presumes to violate the unity of the faith in favor of any fanciful opinion which he can graft on particular passages of Scripture, often detached from the context by which they are elucidated, and almost always interpreted, without attending to those restrictions and limitations, which they should receive from a due regard to the particular scope of the writer.

In this account of the matter, there is nothing which is not confirmed by daily observation. We are all aware how much the character of the individual mixes itself with that of his faith, imparting to the subject, the general appearance of gloom and austerity, or of laxity and indulgence. Nor is it difficult to discover how this connexion is established ; for a representation, comprehending so many particulars of the deepest interest, relative to the attributes and the counsels of God ; the weakness of man, his duties, and his prospects, is fitted to make a variety of impressions ; and those by which the mind, from its particular constitution, is most easily affected, shall naturally determine the parts of the subject, to which it is most forcibly attracted. Accordingly a general character is imparted to the whole, which it receives from the particular medium through which it is viewed, or the aspect in which it is contemplated : and the leading features of the subject being thus determined, the passages of a

different character are either overlooked, or forced into a conformity with a system already established on its own narrow basis.

It was thus that the Jews of old, by fastening on those prophetic descriptions of the reign of the Messiah, which seemed to coincide with their own selfish views, to the neglect of those places, which might have shewn them, that the Gentiles were to be included in the privileges to be conferred, not only rendered themselves incapable of apprehending the spirit of these prophecies before their accomplishment, but were so far infected with these narrow and illiberal prejudices, as to be precluded from the benefit of that light, which the completion reflects on the prediction.

In the same manner, by fixing on those places wherein the promised Messiah was described as a triumphant prince, to the exclusion of those, which related to his humiliation and sufferings, some of them were prepared to revolt against their temporal rulers, and to place him at the head of their civil polity : all were scandalized at the meanness of his condition, and were absolutely confounded by the seeming ignominy of his crucifixion.

Even among his reputed followers, who profess to receive Him as the appointed mediator between God and man, the diverse descriptions of His nature and offices, as they are partially selected in accommodation to pre-established pre-

judices, have led some to deny his Divinity ; others his humanity, together with many of the doctrines emphatically inculcated by himself and his Apostles.

Nor is there less diversity of opinion respecting the natural condition of man, or the part assigned him in the work of his own salvation.

Some connecting the promises of the Gospel, with the simple belief in a certain system of doctrines, will not allow to human efforts any efficiency in this concern. By these, Faith is regarded only as an evidence to the individual of the gracious designs of God towards the object of his special favor, and works in like manner, merely as a manifestation of Faith. Others, with juster notions of Faith, as the principle by which the Grace of God is applied to us, will not admit of any such efficiency in human works ; and they are not few, who are willing to ascribe to their endeavours, a merit inconsistent with the doctrines of God's free Grace.

Some, by fixing their attention exclusively on the sanctifying influences of the Spirit, as the means whereby the renovation of man is accomplished, conceive that they are released from the necessity of any particular attention to doctrines ; and there are others, who, by confining their views to the precepts of Christianity, have been led to regard it as a mere system of moral duties, enforced perhaps by extraordinary sanctions.

These distractions afford a ready excuse to all who desire to justify their indifference to religious principle ; whilst to the serious enquirer after truth, who seeks for some settled basis on which to rest his hopes, they are the occasion of perplexing doubts and distressing apprehensions.

All will demand, though from different motives, the cause of this disunion among those who profess to derive their opinions from the Sacred Volume. Can it be supposed that the Word of God should contradict itself? Far from us be this blasphemy. We are convinced that from the beginning to the end of a work, written by such a variety of hands, in so many different circumstances, and carried on through so many distant ages, amidst all the fluctuations of society and of opinion, there exists that harmony, not only of spirit and design, but of particular doctrines and precepts, which cannot be accounted for, on any supposition, except that of the Divine inspiration.

For the source of the evil we have been considering we are directed to the peculiarities of the characters of those, for whose use it was intended ; and the Word of God, which declares that we may have ears and not hear, eyes and not perceive, leads us also to believe that the same perversity of mind, under the influence of which, some have rejected the counsel of God against themselves, though operating in a lesser

degree, will effectually prevent them from acknowledging or duly appreciating, certain material parts of the system of truths offered for their instruction.

For this perversity of character I know of no efficient remedy ; it is beyond the medicine of mere human skill. All that we can do is to warn men of its existence and its tendency ; to combat the errors proceeding from this source, or what may be still better, to point out the occasions of self-deception inherent in the subject itself. This last is the part which I have undertaken in the present Discourse, from which, if you shall receive any suggestion whereby you may be assisted in your study of the Sacred Volume, your time will not have been spent idly or my labour unprofitably.

As a principle of exposition, particularly useful for the reconciliation of apparent contradictions, I know of no rule which has been more strongly or more generally recommended, than that of interpreting the Word of God, according to, what is called the Analogy of Faith ; by which if it is meant that no particular passage should be understood, in a sense inconsistent with the general tenor of Scripture, it is nothing more than what common candour would require, in the perusal of the works of any author, whose judgment may be supposed sufficient to preserve him from self-contradiction.

But this rule plainly assumes that the reader is to struggle only with the difficulties of the subject itself, unconnected with any prejudices of his own. If the general system of belief is already established, it is evident that the observance of this rule can tend only to the confirmation of preconceived opinions, however erroneous. Every man who derives his opinions from the Word of God, naturally supposes that his belief accords, at least with the general tenor of Scripture : in his view, these things are necessarily the same ; and the rule which requires that he should harmonize particular places with the general spirit of these writings, is easily mistaken for a licence to distort into an accordance with his particular tenets, those passages by which they should be modified or corrected.

The Calvinist is thereby precluded from seeing any thing in the Word of God, which militates against his notion of arbitrary election, unconditional decrees, and indefectible grace.

The Socinian shall find nothing to unsettle his opinion of the sufficiency of the moral law, enforced by the prospect of a future state of retribution, and of man's natural ability for all the purposes of its reasonable fulfilment ; whilst the Arminian Methodist is thereby armed against every thing which might threaten to disturb the confidence of his belief, in perceptible impulses and sudden illuminations.

If each of these conceives that he is warranted in straining every passage of an opposite tendency, into an accordance with his particular scheme, I cannot anticipate any other consequence from the use of this rule, but a confirmation of his opinions, however unscriptural, unreasonable and dangerous.

It may be said that in recommending this rule of the analogy of faith, no violence to the Word of God is contemplated ; that when the meaning of a particular passage is not plainly brought out by a comparison with what is elsewhere delivered on the subject, it is more prudent to abandon it altogether, than to build on it a doctrine not fully sanctioned by the Spirit of God, in those places where the mind of the Spirit is more plainly expressed. This direction may be requisite for our safety, but what satisfaction does it promise ? Nay, is it not an admission of the insufficiency of the rule for the explication of the passage in question ? But it is to be presumed that this, as well as other Scriptures, were written for our learning, and the rule of analogy, which requires that we should place it in contact with something by which it is seemingly opposed, whilst it suggests no method of reconciling apparent contradictions, but increases our embarrassment ; offering no alternative, but such relief as we may administer to ourselves, by forced constructions of the language of Scripture.

If then the rule of the Analogy of Faith, be injurious as a guide and unsatisfactory as a restraint ; some other general direction, less liable to abuse, and more promising in its application to difficulties of this nature, may well be deemed desirable.

To devise such a rule of interpretation, it is above all things necessary, to consider the end and the character of these instructions, as described by the writers themselves, or as they may be gathered from their compositions.

The necessity of attending to this character, will be evident, when it is considered, that there is scarcely any one subject, which does not admit of being contemplated, and, therefore, exhibited in a variety of views, all consistent with one another, and with truth. This observation applies more especially to extensive and complicated transactions, involving a variety of agents, powers, and instruments, motives, conditions, and occasions ; and the greater the number of these, the greater the variety of aspects, in which it may be contemplated. In every case, the view in which it is represented, will depend on the immediate purpose of the writer.

In a treatise purely scientific, the purpose is, amongst a mass of results, to discover the powers or principles by which they are produced, or these being previously known, to trace them in their operation, to the result to be accounted for ;

and where various powers concur or contravene, to mark the precise boundaries of each, their extent and limitation : in all the utmost attention is required, both to the arrangement of the parts to be exhibited, and the precision of the language to be employed.

The Historian floats along the stream of time and seizes the occurrences as they arise. In offering these to view, he is sparing of his own reflections ; for though he sometimes philosophizes, by referring events to their principles, this is only incidentally, and in subservience to the clearness of his representation. His object is to extend the benefits of experience, beyond the limits of personal observation ; and, with a view to this end, he will exhibit in due order, the most material of those circumstances, which contribute to the general issue.

Not so with him, who treats his subject in a manner subsidiary to some purpose of immediate practice, to make a particular impression, to enforce a particular argument, or to determine to a particular course of action. It is irrelevant to his purpose, to treat of any of the circumstances concerned in the result, except such as may serve to influence the dispositions, the will and conduct ; to inspire hope or confidence ; to awaken apprehension ; to stimulate to exertion or perseverance. In subservience to these views, he will exhibit the advantages to be expected, the mis-

chiefs to be apprehended, the difficulties to be surmounted, the aids to be provided. All these he may not find it requisite to embody in any one representation ; and whilst he selects any of these ends, motives, or conditions, which he may deem conducive to his immediate purpose, he is not supposed to deny the concurrence of other circumstances or conditions. Neither though the matter offered for consideration be represented without those limitations, by which its particular station in the transaction is specified, is it supposed that he affords any occasion for misconception by this omission. It is sufficient, if that which he adduces, will bear the weight of argument laid upon it ; and nothing further can be reasonably required.

Now we cannot be at a loss to determine, to which of these kinds, the doctrinal parts of the Scriptures belong. We are expressly informed, that the end of all divine instruction, is practical piety, and voluntary obedience. All Scripture is said to be "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works^d." Indeed it must be difficult to conceive for what purpose we were made acquainted with the counsels of God, if not that the lights thrown on our present condition, and ulterior destination, should regu-

^d 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

late our proceedings, by exerting a suitable influence on our dispositions and conduct.

I mean not to assert, that the utmost regularity in the discharge of our external duties, would satisfy the demands of Christianity, independently of the illumination of the understanding, and the purification of the affections. On the contrary, were I called on to state what I conceived to be the seat of religion, I should point to the spirit and affections ; and for its vitality and essential influence, I should refer to the renovation and sanctification of the heart. "The words that I speak unto you," (saith our blessed Lord) "they are Spirit, and they are Life ^c." But this Spirit and this life, are not the transient sentiments, or morbid feelings, which, by some, are cherished as the means of refined self-enjoyment ; but a pervading, energetic principle, engrossing the will, and directing every active power of our nature.

Vital religion therefore is, of necessity, influential. In the exercise of its authority, it does not indeed, in the spirit of human jurisprudence, place itself as a centinel on the outworks, but it issues its commands from the citadel, which is the human heart. This is the point to which all its holy influences are directed, the views by which the understanding is enlightened, no less than the precepts, by which our conduct is to be regulated. The former present the motive, the latter establish its power : the former infuse the princi-

^c John vi. 63.

ple, the latter improve it into a habit : the former engage the affections, the latter direct their outflowings to the ends of public and private happiness.

In Scripture, abstract speculation receives neither assistance nor encouragement : the views afforded by its sacred authors, are strictly influential : even those which relate to the supreme object of our worship are of this character. His omnipresence, his infinite wisdom and incontrollable power, are fitted to impress on our minds a sense of our entire dependence ; his all-disposing providence to encourage the most unreserved reliance ; his goodness and mercy to kindle the most enobling affections ; his justice and truth to inspire us with the dread of offending him ; and the desire of cultivating within ourselves, these principles of conduct.

These characters of the divine nature, being in the highest degree influential, the declarations of Scripture, on these subjects, are numerous and forcible, whilst the most profound silence is observed, respecting those particulars of the divine nature and economy, the apprehension of which would seem not available for the same purpose. Thus it is in vain, that we seek in Scripture for assistance in those enquiries, relative to the consistency of God's foreknowledge, and the contingency of events : for any information respecting the dispensations of his goodness towards other worlds of his creation, or the unseen in-

strumentality by which he directs the affairs of this which we inhabit.

On subjects of unprofitable speculation, our curiosity is not only unsatisfied, but directly repressed: thus we see that our Lord, in his reply to the question, relative to the number of those who should eventually be saved; whilst he refuses to gratify the idle curiosity of the enquirers, takes occasion to give to their thoughts that practical direction from which they seem to have been diverted. Of the same character, is his answer to the question proposed to him by St. Peter, respecting the end of his fellow disciple. "If I will that he tarry, till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me^f."

The views of the inspired writers shall determine, as in all other cases, not only the nature of the subjects which constitute the matter of their communications, but also the order in which they are offered to our conceptions; for we are not to expect that the doctrines addressed, indeed to the understanding, but through it, to the affections shall be formed into a theological digest, but spread over the Sacred Volume, and as we actually find them. In this respect, the lights of Scripture may be compared to those, by which the universe is emblazoned; among which, we discover the greatest harmony of principle and design, without any ap-

^f John xxi. 22.

parent order of collocation. I mean not that the introduction of these doctrines is either casual or unsettled ; but that being always adduced by way of encouragement or enforcement, for the motive they supply, or the principle they illustrate ; the occasions on which they are introduced, are ever determined by the practical lesson to be inculcated.

We may go farther and assert, that the same principle shall govern not only the selection of the doctrines, and the order in which they are exhibited, but also the extent to which the representation is to be carried in each particular instance. If the purpose of the writer is practical, we must be prepared to expect not full delineations, but such suggestions as may be sufficient to answer that purpose. Accordingly, we find that the doctrines delivered in those writings are seldom carried beyond the immediate occasions, by which they are called for ; the detailed account of the scheme to which they belong, being left to be supplied by the reader, or collected from other places of Scripture.

Thus in discoursing on man's final salvation, if it be the object of the writer to impress us with a sense of our infinite obligations to the great Being who hath proposed this, as the end of our creation. He will tell us, that it is by the goodness or the mercy of God we are saved ; whilst we are left to collect from other places, the

means which he hath devised and applied to this purpose.

If the writer would guard us against the presumptuous notion of human deservings, he will tell us, that our proficiency is the work of God's free Grace ; without whose aid and suggestions, we can neither do nor think any thing good ; and this without feeling himself called on to specify in the same place, how far this work is dependent on the use of the means of Grace, submitted to our disposal.

To impress on the mind of man a sense of the stupendous work of salvation ; to convince him of his distance, by nature, from the condition prepared for him, and the utter insufficiency of his natural powers to help him thither ; to present him with an object for his faith ; to fill his heart with love towards God ; to expand his affections towards his fellow creatures, who, together with himself, are the objects of such wondrous mercy ; and to complete the measure of every Christian sentiment, by which the human soul can be elevated and purified ; God himself is exhibited, as putting forth the resources of his infinite Power and Wisdom, by investing his only Son with our mortal nature ; and in this character, offering him to sufferings and death, as the efficient expiation of guilt ; as the means by which the door of separation is unlocked, and man, weak, poor, and miserable, is admitted to

the free participation of the inexhaustible treasures of the Divine love.

Here, indeed, is an exertion of power for the attainment of the end proposed ; yet the account is not what would be called either scientific or historical. It does not indulge the speculative philosopher, by a view of the connexion of the means employed, and the effect produced. It shews not how the consequences of human transgressions are thereby averted, nor how the benefits proposed are thereby secured. Neither on the other hand, does it exhibit, in detail, the powers and instruments thereby put into action, nor the effects which they severally produce ; that is, it is not an historical account of the process of the work from its commencement to its completion. But it is evident, that all this would be foreign from the purpose of the writer, which is impression ; and that there is much of it, the knowledge of which would not serve any practical purpose whatever. In what has been made known to us, there is abundance to establish our faith, and animate our hopes : to present a steady object for our affections, and a steady light for our guidance : and it would seem, that further information was withheld, only, because it could add nothing to the practical influence of the representation, which has been actually made to us.

If the immediate purpose of the writer should lead him to other branches of the Christian

scheme, he does not thereby forfeit his claim to consistency : he only contemplates the subject in a different aspect, and from a different point of view. Thus, if it accords with his design to represent the principle in the human soul, by which its Creator draws it to himself ; he will tell us, and with equal truth, that it is by faith or by hope that we are saved : and this without entering into a detailed account, of the manner in which these principles become effectual for this purpose. And when he would urge us to diligence and perseverance, in the discharge of our religious or social duties ; he will assure us, that every man shall be recompensed according to his works : a declaration, which, to those who do not advert to the principle of Christian obedience, may seem inconsistent with all that had been before asserted.

This diversity of representation, however, will create no difficulty to the candid mind, being the necessary consequence of a separate consideration of the several branches of the Christian scheme, as they are selected according to the immediate purpose of the writer.

If he treats of the meritorious sacrifice and prevailing intercession of Christ : it will be easily understood, that he speaks of the efficient means, by which the unspeakable benefits of the Gospel dispensation are provided for us.

If of the needful help of the Holy Spirit, it will

be understood, in the same way, that he speaks of it, as the transforming power, applied to us for the attainment of these advantages.

If of the grace of God, and his love towards mankind as the ground of all their hopes: he represents the first and moving Cause of all, suggesting the intention, devising the means, and superintending the execution.

If the writer treats of Christian faith as an indispensable requisite: it is, in like manner, understood that he speaks of the spiritual qualification in the object of God's regards; of the vital principle awakened within him, by which, his mind is enabled to hold communion with his Maker, and is rendered a fit recipient of the benefits provided for him.

Does he insist on works performed according to the will of God, and in obedience to his commands, as requisite for the realization of our hopes? Then it will be understood, that he speaks of them, as being at the same time the fruit, the evidence, and the confirmation of faith; as the means of grace, whereby those Divine Influences, are conveyed to us and appropriated by us.

Were it consistent with the deep reverence which is due to the Word of God, to compare its representations with those which we make of our temporal concerns, I should not despair of shewing, that the seeming variation in the lan-

guage of Scripture, as applied to the same subject, is nothing more than what is admitted among the most plain and intelligible modes of speaking in common use : a variation, which, so far from inviting objection, as implying either inconsistency or contradiction, is understood to proceed from the diversity of aspects in which the subject is viewed ; or in a continued plan, from the difference of parts successively contemplated.

But the matter admits of an illustration, of which we may, with more propriety, avail ourselves : such an illustration is presented to us by the operations of the same great Being, in what are called the works of nature ; and the diversity of views in which we are accustomed to regard them.

Thus when the produce of the earth is ascribed to God, we can be at no loss to conceive the fullness and fairness of his title, whose wisdom arranges, and whose animating power, pervades, the whole of the process, by which, beginning with its first rudiments, it is advanced to maturity. The structure of the seed, by which it is fitted for gradual increase and re-production ; the genial warmth of the seasons, by which its vitality is awakened ; the humidity by which it is distended ; the qualities of the soil by which it is received and supported ; constitute a series of powers, which derive from him alone, their dis-

positions and efficiency. He therefore may well be denominated the author and cause of such effects, whose activity extends from the first intention, through the creation, and adaptation and efficiency of all and each of the means employed for the purpose of man's subsistence. Nevertheless, should the subject of discourse direct us to notice the influence of the dews which fatten the earth, of the temperature of the seasons, or of the natural qualities of the soil; and were we, to ascribe to any of these causes, the plentiful returns of the harvest, would this be deemed in common language, or in common sense, an attempt to derogate from His glory, from whose hand, all had received those dispositions and energies, by which they fulfilled the intentions of his providence? Nay, if the subject should lead us, to speak of the industry of man in the way of exhortation or admonition; whilst we offer to his view the expected result, as the effect, or even as the reward, of his well-directed industry; are we supposed to assert his independence? To disown the spontaneous goodness of God, the efficiency of his power, or the dispositions of his providence?

The image to which I have alluded, has been frequently applied by our Lord and his Apostles, for the purpose of illustrating the dealings of the Almighty in his works of grace; and, therefore, it appears to me, that none can be more suit-

ably employed by us, to shew the manner in which they have offered these things to our conceptions.

This treatment of the doctrines belongs to the very nature of such discourses, and is not to be regarded as a defect, though it must be admitted, that to the captious and sophistical, this variety in the accounts of the same subject, affords endless occasions for misquotation and misrepresentation. Nay, to the candid enquirer, though here there is far less danger, it may be the cause of some embarrassment; the consistency of such representations, being not always apparent, to him who is not guided by a suitable principle of exposition.

But the advantages which belong to this mode of instruction, far outweigh its possible inconveniences. The lights whereby we discern the motives by which we should be influenced, and the course into which we should be directed, are not only afforded with a degree of strength fully commensurate to our necessities; but to prevent, as far as might be, the possibility of unintentional error, of misconception or misapplication, the doctrines are rarely, if ever, delivered without an exemplification of their practical bearing. Thus lights are mutually reflected. The doctrine exhibits the motive recommended; and the specification of the motive, is the illustration of the doctrine, as to its spirit, its import and its uses.

Such is the method of teaching pursued in the Sacred Volume : and it cannot be too highly valued, comprising, as it does, every advantage of practical instruction : and preventing, as far as it is possible, all misconception of the import of particular doctrines and precepts, by combining both in the same lesson, and in the most intimate union.

I doubt not, my friends, that you have anticipated the uses which I would make of these remarks : If the views afforded in the doctrinal passages of Scripture, are limited in each instance, by their relation to the motive to be represented, or the principle to be inculcated : it will be evident, in the first place, that the rule of the Analogy of Faith, as it is commonly understood, is not that by which they should be harmonized ; because the rule itself is founded on the supposition of coincidence, or something approaching to coincidence, in the passages which relate to the same subject : an expectation which, if it were realized, would fill the Sacred Volume with tautologies. You will readily acknowledge the unreasonableness of seeking for uniformity in these representations. You will perceive that it is not coincidence which should be sought for, but that harmony which belongs to the several views in which the same subject may be exhibited.

You will perceive, in the second place, that the particular view, in which the subject is, in

each instance, offered to your contemplations ; is to be sought for, in the uses to which, it is applied. The sacred writers have seldom failed to furnish this comment. It is to be read in the duties which are enforced, the vices which are condemned, the courses prescribed, the motives presented, and the principles inculcated. Or, where the application of the doctrine is not thus expressly made by the writers, you can scarcely fail to discover it, in the occasion on which it is introduced, the characters addressed, the dispositions reprov'd or encouraged. And the rule I would recommend is, that you should never suffer yourselves to wander into doctrinal speculations, without taking to your aid, this comment which your heaven-instructed teachers have, themselves, deemed requisite, for your guidance.

I am the more earnest in pressing this rule on your attention, being persuaded that those visionary speculations, in pursuit of which, such multitudes have separated themselves from their authorised instructors, have their origin in the neglect of this mode of exposition, by which they should have been retained in the ways of sobriety and peace.

And what other consequences could be anticipated from the neglect of those indications which the sacred writers themselves have deemed necessary to their safety.

In the divine nature and economy, a variety

of subjects are comprized, which it is man's most glorious privilege to contemplate. The sense of his interests and his duties, leads him to his Creator and Redeemer, as the supreme object of his hopes and apprehensions. The manifestation of the nature and will of God, is absolutely requisite to his well-being here and hereafter: these wants have been richly supplied, and God himself has placed before his view all that can be requisite for him to learn in this stage of his existence. But shall man forget that these discoveries, however, great, and beyond the reach of his unassisted faculties, are yet accommodated to his powers of apprehension, and that they hold no proportion to the immensity of the subject, which is thus partially submitted to his contemplations? And if he will presume to let his mind loose into this indefinite space, without guide or landmark; if he will venture into this boundless ocean, without chart or compass; heedless of those practical directions with which his Divine Instructor has accompanied his manifestations, who shall define his wanderings, or set limits to his extravagances?

But let not this be charged upon our inspired teachers: they have not been deficient in caution; nor have they withheld the necessary safeguards; and if any will presume to speculate on the subjects they have suggested, unrestrained by the limitations which they should receive from

their application, themselves alone are answerable for the consequences.

It has been my object in the foregoing remarks to shew the necessity of studying the doctrines of Scripture in the spirit of the teachers themselves, and with the safeguards they have furnished; this will do much to ensure your safety. Far am I from undervaluing the helps of expositors; yet I will venture to assert, that without any other assistance than this practical exposition to be found in the Scripture itself, you may be able not only to guard against sectarian errors; but for the most part, to discover the means of their refutation, in the very passages adduced in their defence.

The rule which requires that we should seek the import of doctrinal passages in their practical application, may seem peculiarly fitted to guard the sobriety of Scripture, from the wild speculations of Antinomianism; but its use is by no means limited to the exposure of the errors of this school: I am persuaded, that it will enable you to bring to the test of truth, the opinions of those who have reduced the revelations of God, to a mere system of moral instructions; no less than of those, who think they discover in the offer of God's free grace, an exemption from the restraint of the moral law; in short, that is fitted to guard against all those errors, (and most part of

those by which the Church of Christ is divided are of this nature,) which are incident to all, who mistake partial exhibitions for full expositions of the Divine economy.

It may be expected that I should illustrate these remarks, by a few exemplifications.

I would ask then, is it possible that the Calvinistic doctrine, which carries the notion of the Divine agency, so far beyond that of preventing and assisting grace, should be supposed to derive any support from the declaration, that "it is God which worketh in us to will and to do after his good pleasure^s." If any attention had been bestowed on the exhortation which is enforced by this representation, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling?" The Socinian is not more unreasonable in selecting this member of the sentence, in support of his doctrine of man's sufficiency for every thing connected with salvation; than the Calvinist in fastening, exclusively, on the other part, for the confirmation of his doctrine, that man can do nothing towards the advancement of this work. Yet one or both of these opinions must be rejected; for it is plain, that no writer of common sense, much less an inspired Apostle, could advance these contradictions, not only in the same discourse, but in the same sentence.

But the doctrines preached by St. Paul, far

^s Philip. ii. 13.

from inconsistency, are presented not only in one view, but in the closest connexion.

The passage is to be regarded as a precept enforced by a most awakening consideration. We are required to work out our Salvation, not merely with an earnestness of application, proportioned to the magnitude of the prize for which we labour; but also with a trembling anxiety, suited to the sense of our weakness and our wants; and to the feeling of our absolute dependence, for all the means facilities and suggestions, on that God, to whose favour we aspire, and who though long-suffering and tender in mercy and compassion, may be provoked to take his Holy Spirit from us. The passage, therefore, viewed in the light afforded by its practical application, so far from affording any countenance to the doctrine which it is adduced to support, leads to a conclusion directly opposite.

When those who set themselves forward as expositors of the Word of God, are found capable of thus rending a text from its application in the very context, for the support of a sectarian dogma, can we expect that they shall have the patience or the candour to put together passages exhibiting other views of the same subject, which must be collected from different, and frequently, from distant parts of the same repositories of revealed truth?

In the same way of interpretation, the kindred

doctrine of unconditional election, is supported by the following declaration of our Lord ; “ No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him ¹. ” Now who shall presume to fix the import of this declaration, without any regard to the occasion by which it was called for, or the characters of those to whom it was addressed ?

Looking to the narrative to which this representation belongs, we find that many of the Jews, whom our Lord had fed by an exertion of his supernatural power, had followed Him to a considerable distance ; expecting to receive from Him a continued supply of their natural wants. It is our Lord that imputes to them this motive. “ Verily I say unto you, ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled ¹. ” Nor was it long before that their motives were more openly manifested : for no way disconcerted by this rebuke, they proceed to set before Him, for his imitation, the example of Moses, by whom their fathers had been fed in the wilderness ; expressly requiring that He should support them in the same manner ; i. e. by a departure from the established methods of Divine Providence, for which there was not now the same occasion. Of his divine power, therefore, they entertained no doubt ; but being insensible to any wants but those of the

¹ John vi. 44.

¹ John vi. 26.

body, this was the only exertion of that power they desired. For when our Lord informs them, in a strain of language similar to that which He had addressed to the woman of Samaria, that the bread which He descended from Heaven, to distribute, was not the nourishment of their bodies, but that spiritual sustenance by which they should be quickened to everlasting life; these carnal and besotted people, having no relish for this spiritual food, express their discontent in reflections on his person and condition. And to these murmurings of dissatisfaction, our Lord replies in the language already quoted: "murmur not among yourselves, no man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him."

Now who can maintain that this was intended by our Lord as an excuse for their incredulity, which it must have been, if it implies, as some seem to think, that the helps so necessary to human infirmity, were withheld from these wretched people; and not rather a charge against those on whose grovelling minds the divine teaching had made no impression? It seems evident to me that the passage is of this latter description; more especially when it is considered that, in Scripture language, God is said to do that which is the consequence of the provisions He hath made for the purpose; and that He is said, not to do that, which does not follow, though the cause of the failure be in ourselves.

Those who come to Christ, are they, who laying hold on the deliverance He hath offered, and on Himself as the great captain of their salvation, yield to Him a willing and unreserved obedience, suitable to such hopes and such reliance. And the Father sends them to Christ, when He produces in them this faith. But how does He communicate this principle? Is it by overpowering impressions and irresistible impulses? Far from it: but by such instructions as may be neglected, and such attractions as may be resisted. For such is our Lord's commentary, on all that He had previously delivered, respecting the operations of God on the human heart. "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him. As it is written in the Prophets, and they shall be all taught of God." On this occasion then, as on all others, we see the divine physician of souls, indicating the nature of the spiritual malady of his patients, and even touching the seat of the disease under which they laboured. They come not to Christ, because that having lost all spiritual vitality, they had become insensible to those divine attractions by which the Father would have drawn them.

The passage, therefore, as it inculcates the doctrine of man's inability, unaided by the attracting influences of God's Holy Spirit, may be fairly opposed, both to those who maintain the

notion of man's sufficiency, and to those who mistake the nature of the assistance afforded him. To the Socinian on the one hand, who rejects the supernatural aid of the Spirit to enlighten the understanding and incline the will; and to the Calvinist on the other, who contends for an exertion of the divine power, different from that of drawing and teaching; that which works by overpowering impressions, and irresistible impulses. But surely it must require uncommon ingenuity, to draw from it any support for the Sectarian dogma, of unconditional election, or reprobation. And yet on such grounds, men will venture to build a system of opinions, which leaves no room for human responsibility; and but little (it is to be feared) for the exercise of that vigilance, which is so necessary in our Christian warfare.

I am aware that, of those who maintain the doctrine of unconditional decrees, there are many who would repel the imputation, of meaning to derogate from the importance of moral precepts, or of denying the necessity imposed on us, of regarding them as the rule of our conduct. And that there are various ways, in which they have endeavoured to establish the moral influence of their religious system.

The most favourite method, and that which is least uncongenial to the doctrine of unconditional election, is by representing works, performed in

the spirit of Christian obedience, as an evidence of our final destination ; and by maintaining this slender connexion, they deem that a sufficient provision is made for the enforcement of Christian morality.

It is said, that works being regarded as the evidence by which we learn that we are included in the decree of election, the natural consequence of this persuasion, is uneasiness in the absence of such evidence, and the anxious desire to possess ourselves of this transporting assurance, by the use of all the means at our disposal. I suppose, as a man who knows that a valuable estate has been bequeathed to some individuals of his district, designated by particular characters, would be pleased to find those characters in himself ; and would, perhaps, be induced to cultivate them, in order that he might correspond with the description, by which he is enabled to distinguish the favourites of fortune.

It is beside, my purpose to examine the reasonableness of this account. It is enough for me to observe, that Christian morality is never thus enforced in the word of God. We are never required to act after a certain manner, for the purpose of convincing ourselves, that we have been already favoured ; but in order that we may be so favoured and rewarded.

Yet such is the force of prejudice, that in defiance of these intimations, the passages in which

they are most obviously contained, will be forced into an accordance with a favourite system.

Thus the exhortation of St. Peter, "make your calling and election sure ^k," has been adduced by one of the chief supporters of this theory; as if the direction of the Apostle was, that we should seek satisfactory proof, that our names are written in the book of life; or, in the language of the author, "that we should endeavour, by evident signs, to be fully persuaded in our own minds *." But to give this turn to the passage, he is obliged to take advantage of the ambiguity, which is common to several of the translations; by taking for personal assurance, the word which, in the original, answers to secure or steadfast; and which, neither in the original nor the translation, is an adjunct of the person, but of the thing. It is not the person who is to be assured, but the thing which is to be secured. X

Here then the bearing of the doctrine, is the same as in every other part of Scripture; where the riches of God's grace, which is goodness unmerited, being exhibited in the glowing language which such a subject is so well fitted to inspire, we are required to set our thoughts on these things; to hold converse with these high objects; to embrace them with a lively and active faith; that proceeding in our course, under the influ-

^k 2 Pet. i. 10.

* Witsius, on the Covenants, Book 3. Chap. iv. Election.

ence of these motives, and with the guidance of these lights, we may reach the high mark set before us; and secure to ourselves, the benefits provided for us, and offered to our acceptance.

But in no one place of Scripture, are we urged to the discharge of our Christian duties, for the purpose of discovering what God has previously ordained, as to our final allotment; of relieving our apprehensions, or confirming our expectations.

I might add, that as this is not the purpose to which these exhortations are applied, so neither is this the feeling actually encouraged; indeed, such presumptuous confidence is in direct opposition to the general tenor of all the divine precepts, whether delivered by our Lord himself, or his Apostles. The tendency of these, is to inculcate the necessity of vigilance, carried even to the extent of fearfulness and apprehension. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall¹." "Be not high minded, but fear²," are the directions of the Apostle, who well understood the weakness and fallibility of our nature, and the state of mind best suited to this condition.

And it is not a little remarkable, that though we are never referred to our Christian walk, as the means of assuring ourselves, that we are included in the decree of election, we are permitted to regard our course of life, as a test of our actual

¹ 1 Cor. x. 12.

² Rom. xi. 20.

condition ; and more especially of our faith, of which it is the natural consequence. And yet, what room could there be for this distinction, on the supposition of absolute decrees ? On such supposition, that which is a test of our faith, would not be merely a recommendation to divine favour, but a test of our eternal, immutable, and unconditional election.

But it is not my purpose, in the present discourse, to examine the grounds of any particular tenets, further than may be requisite to enable you to apprehend the danger of neglecting the safeguards, which the inspired writers themselves have furnished, and the mode of teaching they have adopted ; and this purpose may seem to be sufficiently answered by the preceding observations. The rule which I have recommended, is founded on the remark that the views afforded in the doctrinal passages of Scripture, relative to the same subject, are diversified according to the occasions to which they are applied, the condition of those to whom they are addressed, the motives to be suggested, the duties to be enforced, and the principles to be inculcated ; and you are required, by this rule, to view them in the light afforded by their practical application, this being at once their use and their comment.

Proceeding in the study of the Holy Scriptures with this safeguard, which the writers themselves have furnished, I would confidently assert, that

there are scarcely any errors, which we may not detect by the very passages appealed to for their support ; and (supposing the correctness of the text) that there are few into which we can fall ; at least we may venture to hope, that whilst the conformity of our opinions to the practical spirit of the Gospel is thus secured, our errors of judgment shall not mislead us from the paths of Christian duty.

What has been observed relative to the mode of interpreting the doctrinal passages of Scripture, may lead us to perceive the rule to be applied to those which are purely preceptive.

In reviewing the latter, we shall observe nothing that bears the slightest resemblance to the decisions of the casuist, who assuming the motives and principles by which we should be actuated and guided, applies them for our direction, in particular cases of doubt and difficulty ; but on the contrary, we shall perceive, that the enlivening influence of the word of truth, is carried immediately to the spirit and affections ; and though particular duties are enforced, and in the parables, individual cases are specified, yet in these we recognize the illustrations of the motives recommended, and of the principles to be established.

It is thus that we understand the precept, "swear not at all," as inculcating the venera-

" Matt. v. 34.

tion of the Supreme Being, which should effectually subdue all manner of levity or presumption, in speaking on any subject, naturally connected with his holy name. "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on °;" and "take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself", are precepts which inculcate the most implicit reliance on the Divine Providence. "Take heed, that ye do not your alms before men †," relates, in the same manner, to disinterested charity. "If any man smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also ‡," relates in the same general way to Christian forbearance. "If thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off:" and "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out," is a declaration of the paramount importance of religious improvement; and a direction, to disengage ourselves from every concern, by which it might be retarded.

These commands are not so much the specification of certain moral duties of occasional occurrence, as of the motives and principles by which we should be uniformly animated and directed. In each and all of the precepts of our divine Instructor, we recognize the same character. He condemns those Pharisees, who, inattentive to the

° Matt. vi. 25. † Matt. vi. 34. ‡ Matt. vi. 1.

‡ Matt. v. 39. † Matt. v. 29, 30.

spirit of the commandment, insisted on the punctilious of the letter. He informs us, that the most hallowed ordinances, were instituted, not for our subjugation, but for our spiritual edification ; and he requires for them, not a slavish, but a spiritual obedience.

But though the doctrines and precepts unite in a common object, viz. the cultivation of the affections, and the establishment of the principles of conduct ; yet whilst they are referred to this common end, the modifications under which they are delivered, are necessarily different. For as in the doctrinal passages, especially those which relate to the divine government, the views afforded, are in each instance, limited by the motive to be supplied, or the principle to be inculcated ; so in order to reach to the full measure of the divine manifestations, we must combine the lights which are distributed through the several parts of those revelations.

But it is otherwise with the precepts : these, relating to the same motives and principles, are constantly delivered, unembarrassed by any qualifications and restrictions, which, however, are not to be overlooked, in their application to particular cases ; and as in considering the doctrines, we must look beyond the particular passages for extensions ; so, in considering the import of a precept, we must look to other places for the necessary limitations.

If the Calvinistic Methodist had been attentive to this consideration, he never could have imagined, that his doctrine of indefectible grace, derived any support from the following passage of St. John : " whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin " : and we know, " that whosoever is born of God, sinneth not " . He would have seen that the language of the Apostle, exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit, is naturally extended to the full measure of the principle of all religious duty ; and that it is virtually a precept, directing us to that perfection, to which we should aspire : of the same nature as the following ; " be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect " . If he is not satisfied by this observation, that the passages on which he relies, is not descriptive of the conduct of any, even of the best among us ; but of the Spirit by which the conduct of every one among us ; should be animated ; perhaps the same Apostle may be deemed worthy of some regard, when he declares, that " if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us " . Comparing together the two passages, he may be led to think of the former, that it is an exhortation to holiness ; and that the latter is a confession of the weak and wretched constitution of human nature ; and that far from inconsistency, they

¹ 1 John iii. 9.

^u 1 John v. 18.

^x Matt. v. 48.

^y 1 John i. 8.

shew, when taken together, the fruits of the spirit, and of the flesh, declaring to us, that as far as we partake of the former, we are free from sin ; and as far as we are led by the other, we are under its dominion.

Think not my friends, that in directing you to the spirit of these writings, for the true interpretation of the letter, I would encourage any rash or presumptuous liberties with the word of God. The direction to the principle or spirit of the composition, for the key to the knowledge of its mysteries, is that which common sense would suggest in every case ; and invites neither the praise nor the blame, which may be supposed to be due, to refinement. But here we are not left to the suggestions of our own reasons, our Lord himself hath declared to us, the character of these instructions. "The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit and they are Life ^z." Whether they be doctrines for the information of our understanding, or precepts for the regulation of our conduct, the object at which they aim is the same : it is the Spirit which is to be quickened and guided.

The opposite rule of interpretation, which recommends a close adherence to the letter, to the neglect of the Spirit, is assuredly founded in error ; and must be injurious in its application. Such is the judgment of St. Paul, who, in com-

^z John vi. 63.

mending his own Ministry, declares himself to be made of God," an able minister of the new Testament, not of the letter but of the Spirit, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life ^a.

But the Spirit of the Evangelical precepts is not often misapprehended: here men are preserved from gross mistakes by common sense, which in matters relating to practice, is always at its post, and will not admit of larger sacrifices of personal interest or convenience, than what may appear to be absolutely required.

But it is otherwise with the doctrines of Christianity, whose connection with human conduct, is in the way of general influence, not of particular direction. Here that common discretion in which you are exercised by the business of life is not sufficient for your safeguard: more circumspection is requisite, aided by the suggestions of your authorized instructors; and being persuaded that error in religious opinions, is for the most part, to be traced to partial considerations of the word of God, the caution I have recommended relates to this source of danger, that you may not provoke the Spirit of God, to suffer you to fall into those errors, by building a system of faith on certain passages, detached not only from the body of the Scriptures, but from the very comment which the inspired writers themselves have uniformly furnished for your direction; but

^a 2 Cor. iii. 6.

that whilst you regard every such text in its true light, as an exhibition of such portion of the divine economy, as seemed in the mind of the writer more particularly connected with the argument in which he is engaged; calculated to furnish the clearest light, or to supply the strongest enforcement, relative to the particular duties recommended; you may neither consider yourselves at liberty to overlook what is elsewhere delivered for your instruction on the same subject, nor be at a loss for the principle by which all are harmonized.

DISCOURSE VII.

ON THE DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION.

ROM. viii. 29.

Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.

It is, perhaps, scarcely necessary to inform you, my friends, that among the subjects of controversy, by which the Protestant Church has been divided, there is not one, which has produced more marked distinctions, than the question concerning the part allotted to man himself, in carrying on the work of his own salvation.

Whilst by one part, works of righteousness, performed in the spirit of Christian obedience, are regarded as a condition of our acceptance; another part will not suffer the decrees of the Almighty, relative to this great end, to be fettered by any condition whatever. According to the opinions of the latter, there is in human nature, no power of any efficacy in this stupendous work :

or if the conduct of man has any influence in this matter, that influence is not exerted, in regulating the measure of God's favour, but in a manner subordinate, and consequent to his unconditional purpose.

The Antinomian doctrine of election is, that the purposes of God are effected without any connection with human agency.

The more moderate Calvinist, whilst he agrees with the Antinomian, with respect to the unconditional nature of the divine decrees, does not refuse to human efforts, a place in the work of salvation. According to him, works of Righteousness performed in the spirit of Christian faith, are the manifestation of its renovating power, in the effects produced by it; and are, themselves, comprehended in the scheme, wherein every thing, relative to the salvation of the elect, had been previously and unalterably determined.

These systems are not to be confounded: the latter which affords a place to works of righteousness, is so far favorable to the cause of Christian morality. The concession, that religion relates to our performances as well as to our opinions, is therefore highly valuable. But it is not enough, that the former are comprehended in any view of the Gospel: the motives it addresses to us, should not be weakened; and it is to be apprehended, that the speculations, by which, the Antinomian is released from all atten-

tion to moral duties, cannot, by any ingenuity, be brought to bear on them with sufficient power.

If indeed, the effect of these opinions was merely to discountenance all presumptuous notions of merit, in the performance of the task assigned us, we should scarcely have deemed it necessary to examine the foundations on which they rest; for unquestionably our application is not to the justice but to the mercy of God. But though these representations may have originated in the effort to establish this salutary truth; yet it is certain that they end not here: for if Christianity be a scheme, in the prosecution of which, man is allowed no part at all, or else that of a passive instrument, the origin of his actions being exterior to himself, it is obvious that the foundations of moral obligation are far from being safe: nay, experience has proved, what from the reason of the thing we should have anticipated, that the operation of this system is highly injurious to practical Christianity: that under the influence of these persuasions, the hopes of men become presumptuous, their conduct unguarded, their zeal is too nearly allied to fanaticism, and their humility to despair.

On those of a more bold and sanguine temperament, who are easily induced to presume, that they are the objects of God's special grace, its influence appears to be most unfavourable to that watchfulness, which is so necessary in the war-

fare we have to wage, against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Whilst on those whose characters are marked by diffidence and humility, its operation is, if possible, yet more disastrous. These being unconscious of any particular call, are easily alarmed with the terrible apprehension that they are the helpless, and therefore the hopeless objects of God's unalterable indignation ; and there are few around me, to whose memories this representation does not recall the case of some individual whom such apprehensions have plunged into the deepest melancholy, ending in the ruin of the fabric of the mind itself.

If by its fruits we are to discern the true spirit of Christianity, the question relative to the truth of this doctrine is easily decided. But my hearers, who, for the task they shall have to perform, would furnish themselves with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, will naturally desire to know, on what Scriptural foundation it is made to rest ; and as the passage chosen for my text has been regarded as one of those, in which the doctrine of unconditional election is most expressly and unequivocally asserted, it seems proper to consider how far it is applicable to this purpose. " Whom he did foreknow, he did also predestinate to be conformed to the image of his son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren ; moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called ; and whom he

called, them he also justified ; and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

Now it must have been observed, that a large portion of the Epistle, from which these words are selected, relates expressly to the divine administration in the rejection of the Jews, and the calling of the Gentiles. And, consistently with the principles of the soundest criticism, we might conclude with several learned commentators, that this among other passages, the particular bearing of which is not expressly pointed out by the writer, may be referred to the subject which has evidently engaged so much of his attention, in the production to which it belongs ; more especially, as the language of the Apostle in the verse immediately preceding, seems so evidently to point to the same subject : It is this, "and we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." The called, are those to whom the Gospel was preached ; these were the Gentiles as well as the Jews ; and the purpose for which they were called, was the enjoyment of all the benefits of this dispensation, which was to be extended to the former as well as the latter ; as is manifest from the promise to Abraham, that in him "should all the nations of the earth be blessed". The words quoted in the text contain an exposition of the proceedings

^a Gen. xii. 3.

of the Deity for the attainment of this gracious purpose ; wherein it is declared, that, agreeably to his foreknowledge, he had made all those arrangements that could be necessary to produce in the individuals of the nations so to be called, a conformity to the image of his Son : that in prosecution of this plan of salvation, he called them to the knowledge of the Gospel, by ordering it to be preached among them ; which call, if obeyed, should be followed, on his part, with justification here, and glory hereafter.

In this application of the passage to the national promulgation of the Gospel dispensation, we claim not the support of an express declaration of the writer : But to any person, acquainted with the elliptical style of this Apostle, so characteristic of a mind glowing with the magnitude of his theme, it will not be surprizing, that he should leave the particular bearings and restrictions of his expressions, to be collected from the general subject of his discourse, without waiting himself to make these specifications.

But not to insist on this view of the passage, which would so well harmonize, not only with the remainder of the epistle to which it belongs, but with the general tenor of the Scriptures ; I would now propose to give to the Calvinistic teacher, every advantage he could desire, by considering it in his own way : that is, as an account of the dealings of God with his creatures indi-

vidually, and detached from every thing by which it is preceded or followed.

Even in this way of considering the passage, I think we shall discover in it, nothing which will not accord with the views of natural theology, which teaches, that though the counsels of God, are consequent on His foreknowledge, in order of conception ; they are commensurate to that knowledge, not only in respect of time, but of extent. That this knowledge being from eternity, His determinations must be so likewise: that as it extends to all the consequences of his first creation, His determinations must be equally extended, embracing all the means of grace, and all the particulars of that discipline by which each individual should be conducted to his final destination and allotment, in the scale of being.

This co-existence of the knowledge and determinations of the Almighty, is marked in the words of the Apostle : for “ whom he foreknew, he did also predestinate.” Yet in the order in which these things are offered to our conceptions, the decree of predestination does not occupy the place of a primary or unconditional act, directing all things, even the exercise of the Divine Wisdom, to its own accomplishment. So far from being the foundation on which the entire scheme is erected, this predetermination of God, in favor of certain of His creatures, is

grounded on his foreknowledge of its objects. He predestinated whom He foreknew.

Neither is the foreknowledge of God, itself, the moving principle, to which our views are ultimately directed : if this were the case, as it is certain that all were foreknown, so all would have been included in the plan contrived for security and ultimate happiness. The foreknowledge here spoken of, respects the suitableness of the objects of God's saving grace : in confirmation whereof, it may be added, that foreknowledge, in the language of Scripture, implies something more, than is denoted in the ordinary signification of the term ; and that God is said to foreknow, those whom He regards with approbation or complacency. " Before I formed thee, I knew thee"^b are the words of God to the Prophet, " God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew^c." " I will profess I never knew you^d." " A people which I knew not shall serve me^e." And that the term is used in the same sense by the Apostle in the passage under consideration, is evident from the remark ; of which the account of God's proceedings, as given in the text, is the expansion : " We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to

^b Jer. i. 5.

^c Rom. xi. 2.

^d Math. vii. 23.

^e 2 Sam. xxii. 44.

his purpose." These are they, who from a principle of love towards God, obey the heavenly invitation, and thereby take to themselves all the benefits he Hath provided for them. These are they whom He hath ever regarded with complacency, and whom He is therefore said to fore-know.

Indeed this peculiarity in the Scriptural signification of the word foreknowledge, has been remarked by several of the Calvinistic school *: but so far from yielding any support to their favourite doctrine, it gives additional confirmation to that which is here insisted on: inasmuch as all that is done by the Deity, according to the account of the Apostle, would be done, not merely in consequence of His knowledge of the objects of His mercy, but also in consideration of the approbation with which He has regarded them, as the suitable objects for the effusions of His goodness.

This act of predestination, then, is not an unconditional decree founded exclusively on the will of God: on the contrary, there is an acknowledged fitness, not created by this decree: and the being in whom it is discerned, is the object, to whose security and advancement, God's protecting providence is directed, by the arrangements, implied in the act of predestination.

Further: the representation of the Apostle, so

* Archb ishop Leighton, Com. i. Pet. i. 2.

far from favoring the opinion, in support of which it is commonly adduced, would seem to furnish the readiest means of its refutation : for it does not merely offer to our apprehensions a certain suitableness in the object of God's mercy, independent of the act of predestination ; but it strikes yet more deeply at the foundation of the Calvinistic scheme : for in the order observed in that representation, the decrees of the Divine wisdom, and the exertions of the Divine power, are studiously kept behind the conduct of the Creature, as it exists in the Divine prescience ; for the purpose, as it would seem, of saving the power of self-determination in man.

This is the more remarkable, when it is considered, that the object of the Apostle was to inspire confidence in the extent and immutability of the Divine counsels ; and that the admission of a condition external to God himself, must have operated as a limitation on the force of that representation. This admission, however, is not withheld, and it seems difficult, to imagine stronger evidence, of his persuasion, that man has received from the hand of his Maker, a power of self-determination : and that this principle is not superseded, in any arrangement of his all-disposing Providence.

On the whole, therefore, the proceedings of the Deity being consequent on his foreknowledge, cannot here be referred to arbitrary de-

crees: but, on the contrary, they must be regarded as belonging to an equitable administration, grounded on that perfect foreknowledge of its subjects, which has been universally ascribed to the Supreme Being [A].

And here we might close the argument, with those who appeal from the decisions of common sense, to the authority of Scripture, as it speaks in the text: for we have seen that the passage referred to, is plainly opposed to them.

But those who would deny the authority of reason, when it would raise its voice against a favorite tenet, are seldom observed to be very scrupulous in the use of its services, where it seems to promise them support: accordingly when we shew, that in the representations of Scripture, the decrees of the Almighty are resolved into his foreknowledge: and are, therefore, consistent with the exertions of a principle of self-determination in his creatures: it is immediately observed, that foreknowledge implies, as its indispensable condition, that the things foreseen, shall certainly come to pass; and that certainty with respect to man's future actions, leaves no room for the exertion of any such power as that for which we contend [B].

This argument, by which it is attempted to falsify our plainest convictions, were it equally innocent, might be classed with that of the sophists of old, against the possibility of motion:

the arguments, in both cases, being derived from certain difficulties, with which even notions so familiar, might be embarrassed. But the perversion of reason, which may be tolerated when the object is mere pastime, assumes quite a different character, when its force is directed against the foundations of practical morality.

This remark needs not to be insisted on : it is sufficient to intimate, that reasoning, when properly directed, is an effort of the mind to apply some received truth, for the discovery or illustration of something, which lies more distant from our apprehensions. Beginning with what is confidently entertained, or clearly understood, it turns its light on what is dark or dubious. But is this the course, taken by those, who argue downward from the Divine prescience to the denial of human liberty ? Is the foreknowledge of God a subject of which we have that clear, and complete apprehension, requisite in first principles ? And does the consciousness that we are the authors of our own actions, yield to any other moral evidence in strength or certainty ? Let us consider this matter.

With respect to the objects which lie more immediately within the cognizance of our senses, it is admitted, that our perceptions are the effects of their operation on our bodily organs : that every change in the condition of these organs is attended with a suitable ~~variation~~ variation in the sensations

excited, and that the consequence of a slight alteration in our bodily structure, would be to us like a total change of the scene of our existence. So well founded is the observation of the philosopher, that the quality of our perceptions depends on our own nature, much more than on that of the things perceived.

Now if our knowledge of the objects of sense, terminates, so very far short of their internal nature, should it be doubted that our apprehensions of the great God, must likewise fall infinitely short of his intimate nature and essence? His attributes are not the immediate objects of perception: they are collected from his operations observable in the structure and government of the world: and these do not lead us to the powers themselves, as they exist in the great First Cause: but only to those principles of human nature, from which results somewhat analogous to these, might be expected.

Thus having observed a resemblance between certain dispensations of the Almighty, and the effects of human weakness and passion, such as anger, indignation, love, hatred, compassion, grief, repentance; we refrain not from the use of such terms, when speaking of the principles of action, in the incomprehensible nature of the great God. Nor does any inconvenience arise from hence, inasmuch as we must be aware, that the similitude relates only to consequences, and

effects, and not to the principles of conduct themselves : that God is pure, impassive, and unchangeable, and therefore exempt from all the emotions incident to human weakness.

Our notions of the natural attributes of God are formed, in the same way of analogy ; and though the imperfection of these notions, is not, perhaps, so obvious, as of those which are borrowed from our more marked weaknesses ; it is nevertheless certain, that they are utterly disproportionate, to the nature of that being, whom we endeavour to represent.

Thus, when we suffer our thoughts to wander through the part of God's creation before our view, we are necessarily struck with the order, which exists amidst such profusion, and the adaptation amidst so much variety ; and we cannot refuse to ascribe to the Creator of all these things, understanding and wisdom. Yet we should be aware, that the faculty of perception in God, must be widely different from any of which we are conscious. We perceive by the help of organs, and these organs must have objects : and as both of these things, are indispensably requisite to the exercise of our faculty, so our perceptions are confined by a twofold limitation. But the power of thinking in God is independent both of organs and objects, and is, therefore, restrained by no limits. It must, therefore, differ, not only in degree, but in kind, from any

power of perception with which we are invested.

Nay, when we pronounce that God is a spirit, all that we can rationally mean, is that our spirits approach nearer than our bodies, to the perfection of the Divine Nature, though still at an infinite distance from him : for we may easily convince ourselves, that the nature of the great God, is distinct from that of our spirits, not only in degree of perfection, but in its essence.

He exists in every point of space, not only by influence, but in substance : and yet his omnipresence precludes not the existence of our spirits : and this apparently for the same reason, that our spirits offer no obstruction, to the existence or motion of matter ; *i. e.* because these things are essentially different.

Thus, when we endeavour to raise our thoughts to the attributes of God, our first conceptions are necessarily borrowed from our own nature : but conscious of the unsuitableness of these conceptions, that they require such exclusions and negations, as would almost amount to a denial of the attribute, to the comprehension of which we aspire ; all we can do, is to exclude, whatever is in its character, gross, or weak, or imperfect, without rendering the object too sublimated for our apprehensions.

What do I build on these observations ? nothing positive : my object is, to expose the unrea-

sonableness of those who, profiting by a slender analogy, begin, with what is in its nature incomprehensible : and furnished with arguments drawn from such conceptions, proceed boldly along the *priori* road, to unsettle our plainest convictions and shake the foundations of moral obligation.

The extreme absurdity of extending analogies beyond the circumstances in which they are founded, is readily perceived, in cases where the things compared, are more nearly level to our capacities. For example, when in representing to others the nature of our mental proceedings, we make use of emblematical or metaphorical representations : when we apply the names of bodily actions, to denote the analogous operations of the mind, we are guilty of no abuse of language ; we speak significantly : and yet every person would acknowledge the absurdity, of concluding that our mental operations, are the same in kind, with those bodily motions by which they are represented ; or that whatever is true of the one, may be applied also to the other. The absurdity is not less, when, because the foresight of man, extending only along a line of necessary consequences, cannot include the actions of a self-moved Being, we therefore conclude, that the foreknowledge of God, which is, in kind, totally different, should be subject to the same limitations. Nay, the absurdity in this latter case, is much greater : inasmuch as the perceptive facul-

ties of man, are far more distant from the powers of the First Cause, than the properties of matter from those of our spirits.

In the mode of the Divine existence supposed by the schoolmen, the past, present, and future, are combined together ; not by memory or foreknowledge, but by actual perception. It is conceived, that as all things are understood and performed by the great First Cause, without the necessity of a successive application of his powers ; so the distinction of times is inapplicable to his nature.

We may not assert that this is not so : and if it be so, then that which is foreknowledge with respect to us, would, in the Divine intellect, before which all things are equally present, be the knowledge of present occurrences : which kind of knowledge establishes nothing whatever with respect to its subjects, their contingency, certainty, or necessity.

But be this as it may, what we denominate foreknowledge in God, is, perhaps, as different in kind, from that of man, as the Divine Nature from the human, or as the soul of man from his body ; and may, therefore, imply no more impediment, to the exertion of a principle of self-determination in any of his creatures, than his omnipresence to the freedom of their motions.

In what has been offered to your consideration, it has been my object to guard you against

the misapplication of reason in matters of vital importance to religion and morals : and I trust enough has been said, to shew that in opposing the foreknowledge of God, to the power of self-determination in man, reason has wandered far beyond its proper sphere.

Neither is it to be expected that the Word of God, should furnish any assistance for carrying on such investigations. We know the end for which these communications were made to man from his Creator, and it is widely different; having been informed that all Scripture "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." That Sacred Word is therefore most lamentably perverted, when it is applied, as it frequently has been, to the determination of questions either in natural or metaphysical science. Great and glorious indeed are the manifestations, God hath made of himself, in his Sacred Word, relative to his righteous government, his goodness in the provisions he hath made for our final happiness, and the course by which we are to proceed towards its attainment. And as our apprehensions of the Divine nature itself, are formed, by reference to those powers and principles of which we are conscious, it is reasonable to suppose, that our perceptions of the holiness, the purity, and the benevolence of God shall become more full, and vivid, and satisfying, according to the progress we shall have

° 2 Tim. iii. 16.

made, in the imitation of these Divine perfections.

Such is the character of those discoveries which God hath made of himself: they relate to those moral perfections, to which we are invited to aspire. The communications relative to his natural attributes, are limited to this main end, which is our spiritual advancement. Accordingly they are few, and these few are addressed to our faith, not to our powers of apprehension. The nature of these manifestations, therefore is aptly characterized, by that accorded to the entreaty of Moses, when he desired to behold the glory of God. "While my glory passeth by, I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand, while I pass by. And I will take away my hand, and thou shalt see my back parts; but my face shall not be seen^f." The language of the inspired writers, respecting the intimate nature of the first Cause, corresponds to this imperfect and figurative representation. He is said to hide himself from human observation, to have his dwelling in darkness, which no eye may penetrate.

But to supply the place of these more perfect disclosures, which, perhaps, are not suited to our present condition, it would seem, on the authority of Scripture, that we are freely permitted to help our imperfect conceptions, by figurative

^f Exod. xxxiii. 22, 23.

representations : and in this way to ascribe to him organs of speech, and human affections ; but without being allowed to suppose that such weaknesses can have any place in the nature of the great Being, to whom we would elevate our thoughts.

In this manner God hath condescended to humble himself to our capacities ; to visit the walks of men as those of Adam in the garden of Eden ; that by meeting our view, in every line of excellence in which we are required to advance, he might engage our affections, and stimulate our exertions, and thus prepare us for fuller manifestations of his glory, in a different state of existence.

If the truth of these observations is admitted, we shall not presume to suppose, when the Apostle ascribes foreknowledge to God, that it was his intention to define the nature of that power of apprehension, as it exists in the great First Cause : how far, this attribute, is consistent with the contingency of events, or whether time, that modification of every existence of which we have a distinct perception, can properly relate, either to the being or the perceptions of the Deity. No, my friends, the design of the Apostle, was to beget a lively hope in the followers of the Lord Jesus, founded in the sufficiency of his providence, in whose hands we are. This is evident from the declaration, in support of which, his

account of God's proceedings is introduced. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God^s."

When, in order to assure us of this, he would communicate his persuasion, that all events whatever, are comprized within the plan of God's wisdom, and that notwithstanding the inconceivable extent of the sphere of his observation, no occurrence, however minute, can possibly elude his vigilance; how could he have declared this persuasion, more fully or significantly, than by ascribing to the Deity the most perfect foreknowledge?

The following verses contain a more detailed account of God's proceedings, by which, agreeably to his foreknowledge, all things are made to work together for good to them that love God. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren."

Now when the Apostle would give us to understand, that nothing can take out of the hand of God, the object of his mercy: that seeming impediments are real furtherances, to those who take the Divine will as the rule of their conduct: that trials and temptations, are the wholesome discipline, by which their spiritual strength is exercised and matured: that dangers are the means

^s Rom. viii, 28.

of security, and that in the dispositions of his providence, all things are made to work together for good, to them that love God: how could he have summed up this encouraging representation more comprehensively than by the use of the term Predestination?

The Scripture doctrine of predestination being then applied, exclusively to this purpose, that of impressing us with a feeling of security respecting the arrangements of God's all-protecting providence, you perceive the exquisite propriety, with which the decrees of the Supreme Ruler are placed, in order of succession, next to his foreknowledge: and taking this view of the subject, you cannot fail to acknowledge, that the doctrine of predestination is, in truth, what the Articles of our Church have represented it, full of unspeakable comfort; invigorating and establishing our faith in God; inspiring the persuasion, that nothing external to man himself; that neither height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall have power to wrest from his hand, those whom he hath deemed, the fit objects of his saving mercy.

“Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called.” Generally speaking, they are the called, to whom the Gospel is preached; but those only are the called, according to his purpose, who respond to the glad tidings, with love to God for his surpassing mercies; and who by

filial obedience to the heavenly call, receive unto themselves, those inestimable benefits, which are stored for them in the treasury of his Providence [c].

In confirmation of his original statement, that "all things work together for good to them that love God." The Apostle proceeds to declare the wonders of the Divine goodness, to those who are actuated by this principle of filial obedience; adding, "and whom he called, them also he justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we say then to these things? If God be for us, who shall be against us?"

Every thing has been done for us that could be expected of infinite wisdom, acting under the direction of infinite goodness. On the part of the Supreme Being, all the arrangements are complete; and if it is not our fault, they will also be infallible. But is the issue exempt from this condition? When it is declared, that "whom he called, them he also justified," is this to be understood to mean that this call will be effectual, even to those who disobey it? Or that none can or will disobey, who are so invited? Assuredly neither; for our Lord has informed us, that "many are called, but few are chosen."

But for the purpose of saving the doctrine of unconditional election, a distinction is made between an effectual and an ineffectual call; and it

is asserted, that they who have been previously elected, are they who are called effectually [D].

There is indeed a difference, and a wide one, between an effectual and an ineffectual call, as it is answered by our obedience or otherwise. But on the part of the Deity, we are not warranted in making any such distinction.

The Scriptures do not authorise the blasphemous assertion, that God has invited some with a determination to follow up his invitation, by every needful help, whilst having invited others, he leaves them without it. And in the offers he has made to us, who shall call in question his sincerity and truth? Nay, are they not pressed on us, for our acceptance, (humanly speaking) with the most tender solicitude? “I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people^h,” are the words of God, spoken by the mouth of his Prophet. “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die, O house of Israelⁱ.” And who that has read, can ever forget the pathetic lamentation of our Blessed Lord, over the rebellious city? “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the Prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children

^h Isaiah lxy. 2.

ⁱ Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not ^k !”

Far be it from us then, to suspect that the invitations of the Great God, are insincerely addressed to any of his creatures ; or that he ever withholds from them the requisite assistance. The difference is in men themselves, by whom the call is rendered effectual or ineffectual, according to their obedience or disobedience. And which are they who attain to justification here, or glory hereafter ? The Apostle has already answered this question. They are those “ that love God, who are the called according to his purpose ;” that is, who with filial obedience to the invitation of their Creator and Redeemer, answer his gracious purposes with respect to them ; shaping their course towards the high mark set before them, for the attainment of which, such ample provisions have been made in the counsels of the Almighty. These provisions, nothing external to man himself, can render ineffectual ; nay, all these things, in the hands of the Supreme Being, are favourable to his progress, inasmuch as all things are made to work together for good to them that love God. So that whilst, in every part of Scripture, he is required to look to himself with jealousy and self-distrust, he is encouraged, both here and elsewhere, to look up, with perfect assurance that, on the part of his hea-

^k Matt. xxiii. 37.

venly Father, all things are provided for his present advancement, and ultimate security.

But do we assert in this, that the equity of the administration of God is concerned in making equal manifestations of himself to all men, or that the gracious influences of the Divine Spirit, are imparted to all, in one and the same measure? Assuredly not: there is but One upon whom this gift was poured out without measure: but of the children of men, there are those to whom little is given, and those who receive much; some he feeds with milk, who are not able to bear strong meat; to some he commits a single talent, to others twenty: and knowing, as we do, that the measure of those gifts is the same with that of our responsibility, we may be well satisfied, to confide in the wisdom of God, without presuming to dictate to him, the treatment he should observe towards any of his creatures.

This, however, is not an admission of the doctrine of unconditional election, or arbitrary decrees; but a declaration of our conviction, that the best gifts of God may be abused to our perdition; and that it belongs to him alone, to determine what shall be on the whole the best.

The Apostle speaks of those whom God in his infinite wisdom has approved of, as the fit recipients of all his goodness: and he declares that, to them, nothing shall be wanting, which may be requisite to their progress here, or their glory hereafter.

NOTES.

[A]

IT is melancholy to see, how every thing in Scripture, no matter what the subject of the argument, is wrested by the advocates of unconditional Election, to support their favourite tenet. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, having established the necessity of justification by faith, from a view of the condition, not only of the Gentile world, but also of the favoured nation of the Jews; and having shewn that the latter as well as the former, had fallen short of the Glory of God, supposes that an objection might be raised to the Revelation, God had made to the Jews, as ineffectual, and to his promises therein, as delusive. "What advantage then hath the Jew, or what profit is there in circumcision?" is the question of the supposed objector; to which the Apostle answers, "much every way, chiefly because that unto them, were committed the oracles of God: For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid! yea, let God be true, but every man a liar^a." On which we have the following comment from the pen of an eloquent writer of the Calvinistic school. "Paul had pointed out the possession of the divine oracles as a great privilege to the Jews,

^a Rom. iii. 1, 2, 3, 4.

even when considered in their outward capacity ; but of what use were the oracles of God, the promises and covenants they contained to those whose hearts God has not circumcised, and to whom he has not given the grace which makes the distinctions of Jew and Circumcision to be realities ? Did not God in this case mock them with an empty name ? Did it not impeach the truth and faithfulness of God, to suppose him to invest the unregenerate with such useless and nugatory privileges ? This I conceive to be the objection which the Apostle means to obviate in this place ; for what if some, and they the most considerable part, did not believe these oracles, and not believing them, derived no benefit from their possession, will their unbelief destroy the faithfulness of God ? Does it call his good faith in question in dealing in this manner with the children of the Patriarchs ? Does it prove that God is insincere in his offers of mercy, and that his promises made to all generally are vain and delusory, because without effect ; where it is admitted, that to have rendered them effectual, required, in consequence of the invincible obstinacy of the human heart, another gift of God ; which he was pleased to grant only to some few, and not to the general body of the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ?

By some, I doubt not, these objections will be pronounced unanswerable ; but let us take care how we charge God foolishly. The Scriptures make it evident that God doth in fact hold out the possession of Revelation, and of all those privileges which the Jews once had, and which Christians now enjoy, as highly advantageous, considered in themselves ; so that for the neglect of them, men are deeply responsible. At

the same time, it is equally clear from Scripture, that in the actual circumstances of mankind, without God's special grace, which is not, nor ever was designed to be the portion of all, neither Scripture nor Sacrament, nor any ordinance whatever, will be of final benefit to the possessor, nor will in any measure screen the offender from the just recompense of his evil deeds ^b."

Who, but the advocate of a System, could have gathered from a passage in which the sincerity of God is asserted, in making certain offers to the Jews, though rejected by many among them; that when he made these offers, he knew they could not be effectual, without further assistance, which he withheld? well may he suppose, indeed, that the objections, as he has proposed them, will be deemed unanswerable. But the Apostle, in the passage, makes no allusion whatever, to unconditional decrees; and therefore it is not this doctrine he defends, when he says, "God forbid;" the faithfulness of God relates to his conditional promises, and not to his unconditional elections: and the meaning is simply and obviously, that the sincerity and justice of God in the promises he hath made, is not to be called in question, in consequence of the unbelief of some, and their forfeiture of the proffered advantages. God forbid it should, they were not promises that he would compel them to be just and holy; they were made conditionally, and they have been effectual to as many as received them in the way they were made.

The commentary proposed by this Author, is not only a perversion of the words of the Apostle, but a violation of truth, and a misrepresentation of the dealings of a just and gracious God. "It is admitted," (says he) "that to have rendered them" (i. e. the pro-

^b Fry's Lectures on Romans, p. 79, &c.

mises) " effectual, required, in consequence of the invincible obstinacy of the human heart, another gift of God, which he was pleased to grant only to some few, and not to the general body of the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:" " it is clear from Scripture, that in the actual circumstances of mankind, without God's special grace, which is not, nor ever was designed, to be the portion of all; neither Scripture nor Sacraments, nor any ordinances whatever, will be of final benefit to the possessor, nor will in any measure screen the offender from the just recompense of his deeds."

Now it may be asked how, by the passage quoted by him or any other part of Scripture, is the writer authorised to limit the operative influences of God's grace to his creatures, or to assert, that he will require more at their hands, than he has enabled them to perform? Is it from the writings of St. Paul, who tells us, that even the Gentiles have the law written in their hearts, " their conscience bearing witness, their thoughts accusing, or else excusing one another^c." And that in the equitable administration of God, the demands of his justice are ever proportionate to the advantages conferred; for that " as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law^d?" or does the author discover any departure from this principle, in the words of our Lord, who declares, that in the day of judgment, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, than for the cities in which his mighty works had been performed without effect, and that " to whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required^e."

But all this comes of the supposition, that neither

^c Rom. ii. 16.

^d Rom. ii. 12.

^e Luke xii. 48.

miracles, nor the voice of God speaking in the Scriptures, nor any of his ordinances, are the established channels, through which his Spiritual influences are conveyed to us, but that another gift of God is required to render them effectual, "which he is pleased to grant only to some few, and not to the general body of the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

In the same strain the author proceeds in p. 88. "God could, no doubt, have regenerated and disposed the hearts of all those people towards the attainment of eternal life, as he had regenerated and influenced the hearts of that remnant which was among them, according to the election of grace; but the gift of regeneration, belongs to an extraordinary dispensation; a dispensation affecting a few only, in comparison of the bulk of mankind, at least in the present æra of the history of redemption: these being selected from the rest for a special purpose, and exempted from the common law, and from the general doom."

Now it may well puzzle any one but an advocate of arbitrary decrees, to discover how this is extracted from Romans 5th and 6th verses, in the comment on which, it occurs. The text is simply this, "But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? I speak as a man, God forbid! for how then should God judge the world?"

The meaning of this passage is obvious. The rejection or misuse of the Divine Revelations, by some of those to whom they had been made, is so far from being chargeable upon God, as the author of evil, that it has been converted by him to purposes of good: this we can easily conceive: the obstinate sinner manifests

the corruption of the human heart, which men are so slow to acknowledge in their own persons, and by his punishment, he sets forth to the creation the judicial character of God, in which all its members are so deeply interested. Nay, both the avowed opposition to the word of God, and the transgressions of those who acknowledge its authority, are by the divine wisdom, converted into the means of discipline, and of ultimate security to the faithful, who are confirmed and established by a successful struggle, with the difficulties and embarrassments arising from the prevalence of iniquity.

But if God finds, in the very wickedness of man, the means of accomplishing the purposes of his mercy, why does he visit it with punitive inflictions? This is the objection put into the mouth of the supposed disputant, by the Apostle: to which he answers, If the beneficial purposes to which the wisdom of God enables him to direct the opposition of his enemies, is a reason for forbearing to award to the wicked the just recompense of their deeds, he could then never punish any man in the world, from whose vices good is universally extracted. He could not punish the ambitious man, who becomes the unwilling instrument of establishing a system of equity, nor the avaricious man, who becomes to others, a signal example of the folly of this propensity: He could not punish the Jew, by whom Christ was rejected, because this very rejection furnished the means of establishing the authenticity of the prophecies, respecting the Messiah, which have been thus providentially preserved in the hands of the enemies of the Christian faith; nor the cruel persecutors of the Christians in the first ages of the Church, the

consequent dispersion of the latter having been the means of the diffusive propagation of the faith, throughout the nations of the earth.

The fairness of this reasoning would be admitted, even by the heathen moralist, the good to which the actor was not consenting, never having been referred by him, to the moral character, or regarded as a fit subject of reward or commendation.

[B]

A writer already mentioned in the course of this work, contends for the certainty of the salvation of the elect. This he thinks is implied in the Divine foreknowledge, not to be sure, as the effect of this foreknowledge, but as its indispensable condition. On this I would observe, that the Divine foreknowledge establishes nothing, but the prudence of relying with confidence on that perfect wisdom, which we endeavour so to represent to ourselves.

But he thinks that the certainty of this event, may be established independently of that consideration. His argument is as follows, "It is certain, in fact, concerning any man, that he either will or will not be saved, whether it be foreseen or not; one of these assertions, either that he will or will not be saved, is now certainly true: which of them is true, I grant, does not now appear, and will not until time discloses it: still one of the events will take place, whether decreed or foreseen or not^f." Now this is not very intelligible: if the writer means, that every event which will hereafter occur is certain to occur, he begs the

^f Dwight's System of Theology, Sermon xv.

question, and does not advance a single step towards the proof of it.

If it is meant, that the certainty which now appears to be divided between the two cases, can belong only to one of them, though that one may not now be specified, there is some shew of argument, which it may be worth while to examine.

The writer sets out from an incontrovertible maxim, that of two contradictory cases, it is certain, that one must arise; he then proceeds to state, that the certainty which seems to be divided between them, can belong in reality to no more than one; therefore that one, though we do not know which, is certain to happen; that is, the certainty belongs to the things themselves, the uncertainty to our anticipations.

Now by the same kind of argument, he might prove that man's salvation is necessary; he has only to say of this, or any conceivable event, that it is necessary it should occur or not; but this necessity which seems, to our apprehensions, to be divided between the two cases, that of the occurrence, and that of the non-occurrence, can really belong to one only; and therefore, that one is necessary. In fact, the certainty in the former instance, and the necessity in the latter, belong to our convictions. As to the mode of the occurrence, we do not in the original premises assert any thing. All that we do profess to know is, that one of the cases will occur; of this we are certain, or we find ourselves under the necessity of making this admission; and when this certainty or necessity is transferred from our convictions, to the things themselves, we reason sophistically.

It is almost needless to observe, that human liberty

is restrained, not by the supposed certainty of occurrences, but by their necessity.

[C]

But how, it has been asked, are God's designs to become abortive? He knows whereof we are made, and can order us, and all things, according to his pleasure: "has he not, suppose you, counted the cost of his undertaking, that like the vain sons of men, he should desist from his work, because he has not wherewith to finish? Will he find the object of his choice, either worse or more wretched than he supposed in his foreknowledge, so that his compassion should fail, the subject prove incorrigible, the perfecting of the work of grace, in his case, something too hard for God?"

Now against this mode of viewing the subject, we must enter our protest. Arguments *a priori* in theology, are for the most part utterly unmanageable by the mind of man, and the systems constructed in this way, are frequently inconsistent not only with the spirit of Christianity, but with that of mere Theism.

It is painful to institute any comparison between the Calvinistic Divine and the Atheist; but the interests of truth require, that we should notice a resemblance in their mode of reasoning. Even here there is a wide distinction. The atheist decides upon the intentions of God, or rather on what should be his intentions; on the authority of his own reason: The Calvinist supposes, that he finds an account of these intentions in

§ Fry on Rqm. p. 364.

Scripture. But the purposes of God, being once settled, according to their respective methods, both conclude alike from the incontrollable sovereignty of God, that such must be the issue. The atheist would tell us, that a being supremely wise and good, must will, that his creatures should be universally and indefectibly happy: and nothing can frustrate his intentions. The Calvinist tells us that men are called in order to their being ultimately saved: that this is God's intention, in calling them, and what can oppose itself to his will? therefore all who are called must be ultimately saved.

Here we see the extreme danger of deciding hastily on the intentions of God. In fact our notions of the Divine purposes, as of all things relative to the supreme Being, are necessarily vague and inadequate, further than as they may furnish the directions or stimulants, by which, we are to be aided in the discharge of our religious duties. When we consider the irresistible power and all-seeing wisdom of God, we can have no hesitation in ascribing to him all events not dependent on the will of any other free agent: as being produced by the intervention of second causes, which have received from his hand all their fitness and efficiency. Nor can we see any reason for saying, that such events were not intended. Beyond this, whatever is disposed by the supreme Being for the attainment of a certain degree of perfection, is in Scripture language, said to be so intended. But do we find that all which is fitted for the attainment of a certain end, or a certain degree of perfection, and which, therefore, God is said to have so intended, invariably arrives at that state? Do all the seeds of plants fructify? Do all the means of

grace become effectual to that salvation which is their evident tendency? What is there that can render God's plans abortive, or mar his designs in the operation of nature, or the dispensations of grace? It is in vain we apply to the Calvinist for the answer to this question; but we have the answer from our Lord himself, who tells us that the cause of the failure of the spiritual as well as of the natural seed, is in the soil wherein it is sown.

But the advocates of unconditional election, are not to be silenced by such declarations: for according to them, even the actions of intelligent beings, together with their consequences, are to be ascribed to God: inasmuch as he created them, foreseeing all that their dispositions would lead them to do; therefore, as not only the circumstances of their external condition, and the influences of his Spirit, which belong to the dispensations of his providence and grace, but men's voluntary actions consequent thereon, are all alike comprehended in the plans of the supreme Being, the final issue, whether it be salvation or reprobation is dependent on no condition. But is this doctrine of the sovereignty of God so held, as to make him the author of sin, or to deny to his accountable creatures the exercise of freedom? Even the Antinomian will be slow to contend for it in the former way, and the moderate Calvinist disclaims it in both. The latter acknowledges that God could create a moral agent vested with the power of self-determination, and in this acknowledgment he entertains more worthy notions of the supreme Author of all, than those who would limit his power to the creation of beings impelled only by external influences. And we, on our part admit, that

it may be difficult to reconcile the exercise of such a faculty in man, with the power and wisdom of the supreme Being extending to all the consequences of his first creation ; but this difficulty is not greater than that of conceiving the possibility of the creation of any thing else, even of senseless matter. Construction and formation are operations familiar to our imaginations ; but the possibility of producing any thing, without pre-existent materials, we must be satisfied to admit, without pretending to conceive. In the same manner, we must admit the existence of the power of self-determination in man, and of the all-disposing wisdom, and all-pervading energy of God.

But what avails the admission of these things if men will permit themselves to deduce from one side, consequences inconsistent with the other ? And from what part of the representation do they argue ? I will not say from that of which we are least assured ; but it is from that of which our apprehensions are most imperfect, *i. e.* from the nature and operations of the supreme God.

How much more reasonable and more suitable to our condition ; to bear ourselves with that moderation exemplified in the XVIIth Article of our Church ? After guarding the doctrine of election from abuse, this article leaves it to be considered according to the powers of mind in each individual, concluding with a recommendation to regard the promises of God, as they are generally set forth in the Scriptures. But in what manner are they set forth ? is it not conditionally ? Is not both the protection offered to the Jews, and the salvation promised to the Christians, dependent on their fidelity to their Lord, whom the former had ac-

knowledge, and that fructifying faith by which the latter is united with his Redeemer?

But here, the Calvinist will turn upon us, by shewing that faith itself is the gift of God, and that all performances which proceed from the working of this principle, are so likewise. But is there nothing in the docility with which we receive, and the industry with which we follow these Divine instructions? or in the way in which we apply ourselves to these things, according to the determining powers with which we are invested? Let the Scriptures speak for themselves. We are required to watch and pray, for we know not in what hour the thief cometh: to ask, for every one that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened: to be liberal, for with the same measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again: to forgive, and we shall be forgiven: and in whatever station we may find ourselves, to apply with industry the talent committed to us, by our heavenly Father. These, and numberless such precepts, with the blessings conditionally annexed, amount to an acknowledgment of a self determining power in man, for the use or abuse of which he is awfully accountable.

Such is uniformly the language of Scripture in all its precepts; nay, inasmuch as the full exhibition of the sovereign power of God, might mislead us with respect to the necessity for our own endeavours, we find that God himself hath veiled those glories by which we might be dazzled, having condescended to submit to the imputation of the changeableness of human weakness, rather than to shake those apprehensions of responsibility, on which so much depends. Thus he declares to Eli, "I said, indeed, that thy house, and the house of thy

Father, should walk before me for ever; but now the Lord saith, be it far from me, for them that honour me, I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed^h." And precisely in the same spirit, "When I say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness and committeth iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it. Again, when I say unto the wicked, thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; if the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live, he shall not dieⁱ." True it is, that "every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning^k". It is no less true, that we can set no limits to the love of God, for "He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not, with him also freely give us all things." But does it follow, that these gifts are overruling influences, secure from perversion or abuse? Or what is the meaning of a day of judgment, in which all men shall account for their deeds, if our use or abuse of the means of grace is not the thing for which we shall be called to account? But according to the Calvinistic scheme, the day of judgment is already passed; nay, it occurred before the foundation of the world; when God pronounced his irrespective fiat, our doom was irrevocably fixed, and it is in vain

^h 1 Sam. ii. 30.

^k James i. 17.

ⁱ 2 Ezek. xxxiii. 13. 15.

¹ Rom. viii. 32.

that we are now commanded to make our calling and election sure.

[D]

In a publication already quoted, the notion of an effectual call is thus delivered, "when men are effectually called by God, it is with the intention of bringing them to glory; as certainly, therefore, as they are called, do they believe unto righteousness, and being justified by faith, it follows as a certain consequence, that they shall finally obtain the inheritance of eternal glory. It is sure to all the seed; that no one who is justified, can again lose his justification may be fairly argued, therefore, from this passage, for in that case, it would not be invariably true, that whom he justified them he also glorified, neither would it be true, that they who are called, are called according to God's purpose. For he can neither be mistaken in the objects of his choice, nor can unforeseen events alter his design, or frustrate his intention, which design and intention had in view their being conformed to the image of the Son of God in glory. Accordingly we find it to be the universal language of Scripture, respecting those who are justified by faith, that they are secure from final apostacy and ruin. They are passed from death unto life, and shall not come into condemnation: there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ. According to the institutions of God, there cannot be. For they are not under the Law, but under grace, and where no law is, there is no transgression. Hence as we saw, those who are justified by faith, are described as rejoicing in expectation of the glory of God. We are not taught to consider their attainment of glory, as

pending either upon any conditions, or on any future conflict, the issue of which is uncertain ^m."

This passage has been quoted to shew the monstrous extravagance of the Calvinistic notion of election. The answer has been already given in the last note, to which we beg leave to refer. If this does not satisfy the writer, let him try to reconcile his theory to the declarations of God, as given by the prophet Ezekiel before cited. For our parts, we should find it impossible.

^m Fry's Lectures on Rom. p. 362.

DISCOURSE VIII.

ON THE SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE OF THE
ATONEMENT.

DELIVERED ON GOOD FRIDAY.

1 COR. i. 23.

We preach Christ crucified.

THE Doctrine of the Atonement, by the sufferings of Christ, is that to which every thing in the Word of God, points as to its centre.

If we look to the prophecies, we meet with the Messiah, who was to be “cut off, but not for himself^a.” Him who should be “bruised for our iniquities,” and “with whose stripes we are healed^b.” In the Law, we perceive various ceremonial observances, and sacrifices by blood; all conveying a lively intimation of the penalty of sin, and bearing a striking allusion to the manner in which it was to be effectually expiated. All this was admirably fitted to prepare the minds of men for the recognition of this

^a Dan. ix. 26.

^b Isaiah liii. 5.

wonderful personage, and to give to the counsels of God a surer hold on the heart of the believer.

It is needless to remind the most superficial reader of the New Testament, of the frequent recurrence to this topic, by our Lord and his apostles : full of its paramount importance, these last will hear or speak of nothing else ; they are determined to know nothing but Christ, and him crucified^c.”

This, therefore, is the doctrine which is set forward most eminently for the contemplation of all who seek the knowledge of God in the Sacred Volume : Indeed the death of our blessed Lord is an event, in itself so tremendous, and in its consequences so transcendently glorious, that it well deserves to be, at all times, uppermost in our thoughts, and deepest in our hearts ; but if at any time more than another, it is to be offered as the subject of our meditations from this place, assuredly it is on this day, set apart by the rules of the Church in all the world, for its devout commemoration.

I mean not this as an apology for drawing your attention to a subject so often and so largely treated by others. No part of the body of truth which it has pleased God to make known to us, is to be sunk in idle compliment ; and least of all this, which is the only sure foundation of all our hopes hereafter. But were it needful to apolo-

^c 1 Cor. ii. 2.

gize, it might be sufficient to state, that even those who hold fast the doctrine of the atonement, in its essential points, are not, all, to be commended for that discretion which is requisite in the treatment of a subject so mysterious and elevated : that it has been frequently exhibited in language unauthorized and injurious : that many finding themselves unable to acquiesce in the representations that have been proposed, have been turned aside in quest of some more rational exposition ; and presuming to theorize on a subject so far above the reach of human investigation, have consequently polluted the word of God with their own fancies, and fallen into errors far more disastrous, than those they had condemned.

It is not my object, in unfolding this doctrine, to enter into a personal conflict with those by whom it is impugned. After what has been already done for its vindication, this cannot be requisite ; and though the same vigilance has not been manifested in guarding it against the perversions of mistaken zeal, yet as it seems not perfectly equitable to withhold the same measure of forbearance from injudicious friends, which is afforded to its avowed opponents, I shall endeavour to mark those perversions, without alluding to the writers on whom they are chargeable.

Convinced of the necessity of imposing this restraint in the treatment of a subject already so warmly discussed, I shall, as far as possible, re-

frain from leading you, my young friends, into that unprofitable field of controversy, where victory is seldom attended with conquest, and the exultations of triumph are followed by so little enlargement of our spiritual possessions. This is a sacrifice not of our reason, but of our passions, at the altar of Religion, within its proper sphere, the services of reason are demanded, and its industry rewarded with the most valuable discoveries: even in the consideration of a subject so elevated as that to which your attention is now invited, there is abundant scope for its exertions; for though the sublime doctrine of Redemption rests not on the foundations of natural reason, yet it is by no means absurd, to presume, that objections deemed rational, should be met by rational solutions; and that reason should be its own vindicator from the charge of opposition to the word of God. Nor is it only in detecting error that we may avail ourselves of its services, but in strengthening the foundations of our faith, and in furnishing additional confirmation to the truths received under the warrant of Scripture. Only let us mark the boundaries of its jurisdiction, and repress the dogmatizing spirit which would venture beyond these limits; let us be careful that we add not to the declarations which God hath made to us, or turn away from those treasures of wisdom which he hath deemed requisite for our spiritual sustenance; the proper aim of

our exertions being to learn and digest what God hath spoken, and not to accommodate those elevated truths, to our limited and vain conceptions.

Now as we consider the representations which the Scriptures have made to us relative to the mediatorial office of Christ, it will be seen that this subject is presented to us in two points of view, distinct, though connected: as it respects the judicial character of God, and the conduct of his creatures. To God the father, he offers that atonement, whereby the pardon of the sinner is rendered compatible with that righteous judgment, by which every departure from the laws of God, becomes a departure from the ways of happiness: He offers those merits whereby he is enabled, not only to avert the course of God's vindictive justice; but to unlock the treasures of his love, for the benefit of his offending creatures, and to obtain for them, those supplies of spiritual strength, whereby from a state of weakness and corruption, they are to be advanced to a state of immortality and blessedness. So that viewed impetratively, the office of the Mediator is twofold: to offer an atonement, whereby the penal consequences of man's transgressions are averted; and to obtain, in virtue of his meritorious claims, such supplies of spiritual assistance, as may be requisite for the advancement of the objects of his commiseration.

Man he draws by the chords of a man, ad-

dressing himself to his understanding and affections ; revealing to him the depths to which he may sink, and the heights to which he may aspire ; proving to him, the extent of the interests to be managed, by the astonishing nature of the methods employed for their security ; and in the mean time, furnishing those instructions, whereby he is to be directed in his present course, and illustrating that course by his own spotless example.

These two branches of the subject are indeed most closely connected. It is one and the same thing, which prevails with God, and with man the object of his compassion : but to our finite conceptions, the views are distinct, as we regard the effect of Christ's mediation in its more immediate relation to God or man : as it unlocks the gates of Divine mercy, or directs mankind to enter by the way he hath established. And in these different relations it is proposed to consider the subject in the present and following discourses.

The doctrine which teaches that human nature is not only weak but corrupt, is one that lies at the bottom of all that is addressed to us, respecting the mediation of Christ. Such is the Apostle's interpretation of the word of God. " The Scripture," saith he, " hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe^d." This

^d Gall. iii. 22.

corruption, charged on the whole of the degenerate race of man, consists in the selfishness of living unto himself, and not unto God ; and in the nature of the enjoyments in which he places his happiness. His heart is carnal, and at enmity with his God ; his affections are engrossed, but not by his Maker ; his powers are excited, but not by the spirit of filial obedience ; his thoughts are engaged, but not by the Divine mercies ; his life is a life of constant exertion ; but how seldom are his efforts directed to the glory of that Being, of whom, and by whom, are all things ? His thoughts being thus alienated from the ends of his existence, and his affections from the source of his happiness, a general character of depravity pervades his entire nature ; he becomes impure in his desires, perverse in his principles, weak in his purposes, negligent of the better part of his nature, and strenuous only in the misapplication and abuse of his powers.

Such is the testimony of the word of God, to which the heart of man yields a reluctant assent : for though reason has not, of itself, discovered the lets and impediments which the providence of God has opposed to the workings of this corruption, so as to be able to form any fair estimate of its extent in its unrestrained operation ; and though it belongs to Revelation alone, to furnish the adequate measure, whereby we can fathom its depth, and that light whereby we may explore

the dark recesses of the human heart ; yet the indications of some prevailing corruption, are too numerous, and too palpable, to escape the notice of the most inattentive and unreflecting. The necessity of human law to protect society from the misery and confusion, which is the natural and foreseen consequence of vice, when unrestrained by the countervailing motives of terror, is the testimony of man himself as to the state of his dispositions towards his fellow man. And the various modes of propitiation, to which men, in all ages, have resorted, is a manifest proof of a general and prevailing sentiment, that all was not right with respect to God.

Against this state of alienation from God, and against every violation of his commandments, his punitive and avenging wrath is loudly proclaimed. We are told, that as righteousness tendeth to life, so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death^c. That "the wages of sin is death^f," eternal death ; that this law flows from the essential nature of God, whose seat is the habitation of righteousness ; that it is, therefore, the universal law of his dominion ; not on earth alone, but in the heights of heaven, and in the depths of hell ; that in perpetuity, it is from everlasting to everlasting ; in its application, unyielding and inviolable ; for that "although heaven and earth may pass away,

^c Prov. ii. 19.

^f Rom. vi. 23.

one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled^s." Gracious God! and is it by this law that each thought, word, and action of thy erring, sinful creatures shall be tried, on that day, when every thing good or evil which they may have committed or encouraged, shall be exposed to the view of an assembled universe? Who may abide it?

But presumptuous man will naturally endeavour to reason himself out of the apprehensions, which the character of the Divine justice, is so well fitted to excite. He will seek to assuage his terrors, by opposing to the justice of the Almighty, his attributes of goodness and mercy: he will flatter himself that man, with all his wants and weaknesses, is an object peculiarly fitted for the exercise of these attributes; at least, that human weakness, must obtain large abatements from the demands of rigid justice. With respect to this fearful attribute, we will suppose him to reason thus: "Those who insist so much on the attribute of justice, would do well to consider, what notion they annex to the term, when applied to the great Author of all things. As a principle of conduct applicable to the dealings of us mortals, one with another, it denotes the regard which is due to the rights of others, in the prosecution of the objects of our desires. How then, can vengeance belong to that Being, whose happiness

^s Matt. v. 18.

cannot be invaded, whose will cannot be resisted ? His rightful claims to our obedience, may indeed be unanswered ; but justice in its most rigid acceptance, never implies the necessity of enforcing our own claims, or insisting on our rights, considered merely as such.

“ The Divine justice, therefore, is purely administrative : by making justice an attribute of the Deity, we express our sense of his inflexible adherence to those rules of his providence, according to which he governs his creation. Whatever, therefore, be the character of the Divine economy, such also is the character of his justice ; but it must be admitted, that the plan of God’s government contains somewhat besides the provisions of punishment, and the modes of vengeance. Yea, the laws of his moral government, are the courses, established by his wisdom for the outflowings of his mercy ; extending to the reparation of iniquity, and the communication of every grace and blessing. These laws, being the result of unerring wisdom, are indeed inviolable ; but as this wisdom, is set on work by unbounded mercy, their inviolability is the glory of God, and the happiness of his creation.”

Such are the representations with which the sinner deludes himself, as to what he may expect from the justice, or mercy of his creator ; which, if they could prove any thing, would prove far too much. God cannot suffer by any thing we

do, therefore he cannot justly punish. This is the argument on which St. Paul has observed, "Why doth he yet find fault, for who hath resisted his will ^b?"

It seems, indeed, to be true, that the will of the Deity acts, by giving certain tendencies and courses to the things of the natural and moral world, and that his commands are the declaration of the laws he hath thus established among the works of his creation. But if the perfection and happiness of the creature, consists in his approximation to the Creator, who is the source of blessedness, as well as the author of life : If his alienation and ablegation from the same Being; constitutes his degradation, and the very essence of his damnation ; who shall question the righteousness of him, who hath made and declared it to be so ? Or who shall presume to dictate to the wisdom and goodness of God, respecting the external circumstances best suited to the spiritual condition of his creatures ?

We know not how far the punishment of the sinner, may be an act of mercy to the universe, in the way of salutary admonition. The answer which the Apostle applies to the question of his supposed objector, would seem to authorize the persuasion, that this promulgation of the Divine will, was, at least, one of the ends of punitive afflictions. "What," saith he, "if God, willing

^b Rom. ix. 19.

to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering, the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction ¹ ?”

Nay, we know not, but that such treatment may be an act of mercy to the delinquent himself, the greatest mercy of which he has rendered himself capable. Thus much we do know, that the hardships of external condition under which we repine, are often nothing more than the restraints to the workings of corruption, which, when it overflows these barriers, is then discernible to self-deluding man: the checks to voluptuousness and dissolute self-abandonment: the lets and obstructions to the innate wickedness of the human heart; and to the devastation in God's creation, which would have marked the course of unrestrained licentiousness. The tortures and torments of the damned, may, for aught we know to the contrary, be in like manner intended for the restraint of incurable wickedness; and, consequently, for the alleviation of that misery, which moral depravity would have engendered or inflicted. In this view, punishment, though final and eternal, may be an exertion of the Divine goodness; and if this were in the contemplation of the Psalmist, he might well exclaim, “If I ascend up into heaven thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there ^k.”

¹ Rom. ix. 22.

^k Psalm cxxxix. 8.

But I lay no stress on these observations, further than as they serve to shew, how futile all abstract speculations respecting matters so far beyond our reach, and how desperate the madness of raising presumptions against the Word of God, confirmed as it is by daily observation. That Word declares his resolution to punish sin : and our observation of the course of his Providence, relative to the connexion between Guilt and Misery, adds strength to this fearful assurance.

Thus we see, that a course of intemperance, whilst it diverts the individual from cultivating and advancing the better and more estimable powers of his nature, tends to exhaust not only the means, but the very capacities of self-indulgence ; nay, even to the injury of health, and of life itself, with all the interests it comprises : that rashness and folly expose men to hardships, which prudence and discretion might have averted : that idleness and sloth end in the forfeiture of those advantages, which lay within the reach of well-directed industry : and that all manner of vice, independently of the castigations of conscience, (which however are part of its punishment) tends to a deterioration of condition.

By thus exhibiting to our view, some of the consequences of sin, by which we are overtaken in the present life, the Deity hath condescended to make us the witnesses of the execution of his

wrath. Nay, as if for the purpose of impressing this sense of his displeasure, more deeply on our minds, God hath rendered man himself, in many instances, the executioner of his judgments. Fraud, falsehood, and injustice, are punished in society, by the subtraction of confidence and esteem ; and not unfrequently by privations and positive inflictions. With all this, and much more of the same nature before our eyes, can it be unreasonable to suppose, that there are provisions in the system of nature, whereby every attempt to introduce disorder and mischief into the works of the great God, shall be met with corresponding punishment ? And is it not unreasonable as well as presumptuous, to raise objections against the declarations of God in his Word, from any antecedent expectations of what he might or should have done ; seeing that all he has declared on this head, is so, perfectly consonant to his dealings with us, so far as they lie within the scope of our observation ?

But if the system of the universe and the law of God is such, that happiness can only consist in an approximation to that Being, who is the source of life and blessedness : if every departure from him, and every violation of his laws, is spiritual death and misery ; what is to become of man, weak, corrupt, and sold under sin, with all his vicious propensities, rapidly verging to endless and irretrievable ruin ? How is he to be arrested

in this course, his iniquities to be blotted out of the book of God's righteous judgments, and himself to be raised to the privilege of a closer communion with his Maker? Who shall interpose to shield him by his merits? There is none on earth, who has not corruptions and weaknesses, deceit and disloyalty to God, enough to cover him with confusion; and who is there in Heaven, whose merit has not had its own plenary reward? what did I say, merit? There is nothing such in the sight of God. No service performed for him, that is not of debt; no obedience that is not a bounden duty. Before him, all is defective: "behold" (saith Job) "the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight:" "behold, his angels he charged with folly!" By whose favour then, shall mortal man escape the misery which the Divine justice has awarded to vice? or who shall divest him of his well-grounded terror, and lead him to the fountain of everlasting joy? We know of nothing, short of the power of Omnipotence, that could effect this mighty deliverance; and yet more wonderful exaltation. Well may he exclaim with the Psalmist, "whom have I in Heaven but thee; and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee."

Nothing short of the wisdom of God, can de-

¹ Job. iv. 18.

² Psalm lxxiii. 25.

clare to us the mode of this deliverance, which nothing short of his power could effect. Here then is a mystery unveiled to us, which fills the angelic host with rapture the most unbounded. God himself becomes the son of man ; that man, weak, worthless, wretched, sinful man, may become the son of the eternal God. For it is revealed to us, that He who was the plenitude of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, in all the infinitude of the Divine love, descending from that state, to take upon him the nature of mortal man ; and that by uniting himself to his creatures, in all the sympathy of sorrow and of suffering, even unto the death on the cross, he was enabled not only to intercept the course of vindictive justice, which could overtake its objects only through him, but also to pour out upon them, the benefits of his infinite merits, those rich supplies of spiritual assistance, whereby they should be qualified to become partakers in his resurrection to immortality and glory. It was by connecting himself with that system in which the destinies of men are interwoven by God's appointment, that he was enabled to direct on himself the accumulated sorrows and sufferings, which are the natural and necessary consequences of vice ; and was moreover enabled to impart to weak and guilty man, the benefits of his merits, by procuring for him those supplies of strength, whereby he should be prepared for

that inheritance of unfading glory he hath provided. For this instruction we have received from the word of God: "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death, he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil^a." "For verily, he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham^o."

Herein, therefore, the attributes of the Supreme Being are united in harmony the most delightful, whilst, so far from compromise or subtraction, each and all shine forth with the most overpowering lustre. He hath manifested his righteous abhorrence of sin, and his just judgment against it, in the very course he hath taken to deliver us from its penal consequences; declaring thereby his righteousness, "that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus^p."

The immutable law of God, by which suffering and death is the penal consequence of transgression, Christ has not annulled; for this were not the satisfaction of justice, but the extinction of this attribute of the Deity. The promulgation of the atonement is not a renunciation of this awful character of justice, in which He has always exhibited himself in his word, and in which we

^a Heb. ii. 14.^o Heb. ii. 16.^p Rom. iii. 26.

see him arrayed in the dispensations of his providence : but a closer union between those attributes of justice and mercy, which our understandings could not have reconciled ; shewing how “ mercy and truth have met together,” how “ righteousness and peace have kissed each other¹.”

Of this wondrous scheme of mercy, established on the immutable basis of eternal truth, enough is revealed, to attract, to impel, to fill the human soul in all its capacities, and by breaking the bonds of our captivity to set us free. And is it for weak man, to regard it with all the coldness and self-sufficiency of a presumptuous curiosity ; or daringly to reject what he may not fully comprehend ? Yet such has been the reception of the doctrine of Christ's mediation, even by many who yet have not presumed to question the authority of the Holy Scriptures, of which it is the very soul and centre.

Various are the theories which have been devised for the limitation of Christ's mediatorial character and office. Some have presumed to represent the sacrificial atonement for past transgressions, as a plan altogether inefficacious, independently of arbitrary appointment : others, together with the atonement, have disclaimed his advocacy and intercession also ; confining the benefits of his mediation to his moral instructions ;

¹ Psalm lxxxv. 10.

illustrated by his example, and enforced by the discoveries he hath made to us, relative to the certainty of a future state of retribution.

It is not my intention to detain you, by exposing the opposition of such doctrines to the revelations which God has made of himself ; that task having been ably performed by several writers in the hands of all. Suffice it to say, that these speculations proceed from a presumptuous confidence in the suggestions of reason, respecting matters so far beyond its reach. The counsels of God are called to the bar of human judgment : whatever is required for the satisfaction of a vain curiosity, is supplied ; and whatever is unsuited to the tastes, the sentiments, or caprice of men, is discarded, as irreconcilable to the wisdom, and unworthy of the sovereignty of the Creator.

Thus it is, that the sublimest mysteries have been treated, even the plan of man's redemption, which "the angels themselves desire to look into." And yet how little are we indebted to reason for what we know of God, or of his judgments ? It is not by reason, that we become acquainted with one or the other ; but by observation of the course of his providence, or the manifestations he hath further made to us by the word of revelation. And yet, from what observation can we derive a single objection to the mediatorial plan of man's salvation ? It cannot be from a

^r 1 Peter i. 12.

view of the system in which we are placed. The system of human society, is one of mutual dependance, and mutual co-operation ; few are sufficient, of themselves, for self protection ; few can succeed to any proposed advantage, without the aid of others. Such is the close relation which subsists between individuals of the same species, that the relief of one is constantly affected by the interposition of another : an interposition, frequently attended with difficulty and labour, and positive injury. And shall we presume to deny, that Christ having entered into this relation with us, and having so far subjected himself to the constitution of nature, could not have interposed in a manner analogous to this, though with so much greater efficacy, as he is in power and goodness pre-eminent ?

They greatly mistake the province of reason, who suppose that it is to supersede the communications which God hath made to us, in what he hath subjected to our observation, or conveyed to us by his acknowledged word. These things are not the discoveries of reason, but the subjects on which it is exercised. The data are such as God in either way hath furnished : these we may not diminish or augment. It is not for us to circumscribe within a narrow outline the attributes of the great God, or to confine within the grasp of our weak understandings, the motives or the measures of his dealings with his creatures. And as it is not

for us to deny what God hath expressly declared, so neither is it for us to dictate what he should reveal ; or in want of what we presumptuously require, to supply the supposed deficiency by our own inventions. This is not to advance human reason, but to bring down the wisdom of God to the level of our weak apprehensions.

I mean not to prescribe the exercise of reason, even in matters which belong to the province of revelation. Reason is said to be the hand-maid of revelation, so it should be ; and confined to this its proper office, it may do important service. It may scrutinize, compare, and examine, and by the discreet discharge of this its peculiar duty, it will not fail to discover what may add stability to our faith and fervour to our devotion. It will lift up our hearts to God in admiration of the magnitude and importance of the things revealed : it will enable us to acknowledge and to feel the beauty, the simplicity, the consistency of the parts of that scheme of mercy in which we are so deeply interested. In the plan of redemption, it will perceive the attributes of God, exercised without opposition or interference, and united without compromise or subtraction : his justice fully asserted, without restraint of his mercy, and his mercy poured out, without violation of his justice ; whilst by the extent of the power exerted for our deliverance, it may learn to apprehend the distance between the condition provided for us, and that

from which we are delivered. In all we may discover, and discovering we must admire, the perfect harmony of the methods of God's government, as they have been declared to us in his Word, or manifested to our observation in the course of his providence. In this manner, we may apply the best powers of our understandings to the things that have been revealed to us ; but the facts themselves, it is not for us to mutilate or discolour. Let us remember, that in a matter of such high importance, indiscretion is madness, and temerity is outrage.

This admonition, I would address, not only to those who would pare down the declarations of God to the standard of their weak apprehensions ; but to those also, who, without discarding any of the matters he hath been pleased to reveal, would nevertheless presume to cast them into the mould of a narrow theory. Such licence is to be strenuously resisted ; inasmuch as every perversion of the doctrines of Christianity, works a double mischief. It not only misleads the minds of those who adopt it ; but by creating a revulsion in others, it drives them as far into opposite errors.

I speak now of those who maintain the doctrine of the atonement in all that regards its impetrative efficacy with the Father, among whom we sometimes have reason to lament the want of that

caution, which so well becomes all who approach this high and mysterious subject.

To be more explicit, we are not warranted in representing the scheme of atonement, as if it were an artificial device of arbitrary appointment, and destitute of all real efficacy in the constitution of God's creation, or the established laws of his moral government.

That the punishment due to transgressions against the will of God, shall in the life to come, overtake the offender in the way of natural consequence, is no absurd supposition; though it must be impossible for us to prove it. And as we are not acquainted with the train of consequences by which this is effected, it is obviously still more difficult, even to conjecture the operation of the death and sufferings of Christ, in taking the sinner out of this course. It is not only possible, but highly probable, that there is much more in this matter, than it has seemed good to the Deity to reveal to us in the present life. And any attempt to supply the supposed deficiency, by the suggestions of our vain imaginations, is not only presumptuous, but highly injurious to the beauty and to the practical influence of the discoveries he hath made to us.

It is not for us to represent the Saviour of mankind, as stipulating with the Father, for the salvation of a certain number of his fallen creatures, to the exclusion of the rest; and personat-

ing these chosen few, by a legal fiction : (I shudder even whilst I allude to a representation so monstrous.) But it is not for us to set in opposition, the persons of the unsearchable Godhead, by representing the eternal Father on the one hand, clothed in the terrors of offended justice, by which he is engaged to punish sin with death eternal ; and on the other hand, the Son stipulating to pay an equivalent, which the justice of God could not reject, and without which, he could not with justice have pardoned sinners.

But surely it may be hoped, that they who offer this representation, are not aware, that whilst they would help us to a conception of the immensity of that debt of gratitude we owe for our deliverance to God the Son, they approach with unpardonable temerity to the inscrutable essence of God the Father.

The God who is revealed to us in Scripture, is not a mere merciless vindicator, intent only on the punishment of delinquency, but the Father of mercies, whose unlimited goodness is chiefly apparent in the work of man's redemption. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him, should not perish, but have everlasting life^{*}." And, again, "He who spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not, with him also,

^{*} John iii. 16.

freely give us all things :?" neither is the Son represented as changing the mind of the Father in favour of his fallen creatures, but on the contrary, the mediation of Christ is referred to the antecedent goodness of God, who is said to have been "in Christ reconciling the world to himself".

The presumption is no less unwarrantable, which, transferring the imperfections of our own limited beings into the nature of the incomprehensible Godhead, would set in opposition to each other, the attributes of the Deity; restricting his mercy by his justice, and confining the exercise of his justice to the punishment of transgression. And this is the more unpardonable, in those who may perceive the connexion of these attributes in that part of his moral government, which is open to their observation; wherein the mercy of God may be recognised in the punishment he inflicts; operating frequently in the way of correction, and perhaps always as a restraint to the workings, or the progress of iniquity. In the former case, his goodness is universally acknowledged; and the afflictions by which we are thus corrected, are regarded in the light of salutary discipline. And are they less the dispensations of mercy, when applied as a check to that perverseness which is incurable?

But whatever may be the difficulty to our finite understandings, of establishing the union of

* Rom. viii. 32.

* 2 Cor. v. 19.

those attributes of justice and mercy, as they exist in the great God ; it is surely not for us to divide them by such representations, as are not warranted by any manifestation he hath made to us, whether in that part of his moral government, which he hath submitted to our observation, or in that which he hath further revealed to us by his holy word.

Again : whilst we look to Christ as the power of God, and the wisdom of God unto salvation ; and whilst we acknowledge, that no other name is given under heaven, whereby we may be saved ; let us not presume to entertain the question, whether the purposes of the Divine mercy could have been otherwise accomplished. It is not for weak man to limit the resources of Divine wisdom, or the operation of Divine mercy ; by declaring what it is that could not be reached by the latter, or repaired by the former ; much less to disparage those incomprehensible attributes, by ascribing to the Father a scheme for the redemption of man, which, consisting in a mere transfer of his punishment, would leave the universe without benefit, without any accession to the total amount of its happiness.

The Scriptures afford no encouragement to such presumptuous speculations : they do not authorise the supposition that the justice of God is concerned in demanding or receiving an equivalent for the eternal destruction of the human

race : neither whilst the remission of the penalty is conceived to be unjust, and yet more unjust the punishment of the innocent, do they require us to believe that the combination of both is the very perfection of unerring justice.

Would to God, that the consequences of such presumption could have terminated in errors merely speculative. But is it to be expected, that the misrepresentation which tarnishes the glories of God, should not also darken the paths of duty? The justice of God being satisfied with plenary punishment; his wrath appeased by a victim of sufficient value ; and a perfect obedience being at length afforded, the merits of which are not to be improved by any human effort ; the interests of the sinner are now infallibly established ; his ransom being paid by a substituted victim, and his acceptance confirmed by an imputed righteousness, he may rest satisfied of his impeccability, and secure of his salvation.

Nor are these its only fruits ; for as the corruptions of Popery have undermined the faith of many, who, repelled by its absurdities, will not patiently explore the treasures of divine truth amidst the mass of human inventions by which they are overlaid ; so it is to be apprehended, that this audacious attempt to fathom the mysteries of redemption, has contributed, (perhaps more than any thing else) to swell the numbers of those, who by rejecting this fundamental

article of our belief, have advanced more than half way towards infidelity [A].

Let us beware my friends, how we join ourselves to those who have so contaminated the fountains of living waters ; and who, though the loudest in decrying the authority of reason when appealed to by their opponents, will unhesitatingly exercise it in all the subtleties of metaphysical abstraction, in quest of arguments for the support of a theory, for which the Scriptures afford them no foundation. Let us fearfully refrain from all such unwarrantable liberties with the word of God ; liberties, which are no less presumptuous than unwarrantable ; and no less dangerous than presumptuous. The manner of operation, according to which the sufferings of Christ have obviated the tendencies of sin, and placed within our reach, the treasures of divine love ; let those declare, who will undertake to describe the course, according to which, the transgressions of the present life should have worked out their own misery in the life to come. You, my friends, will do well to remain satisfied with that portion of truth, which the goodness of God has been pleased to reveal, and which the wisdom of God has deemed sufficient for our information and direction ; or if we seek further information, let God be his own interpreter. The course of his moral government, which he hath made known to us by observation, though far short of that

which he hath discovered by the word of revelation, both in extent and influence, furnishes, by its perfect harmony with those further manifestations, the most useful confirmations of their authority, and the most satisfactory explanations of their import. Even within the limits of our confined experience, there is enough to assure us, that, though by the laws of the Divine government, every transgression tends to privation and misery; yet, according to the operation of the same laws, the transgressor is frequently taken out of this course by well-timed interposition; interposition, frequently attended with the sacrifice of the interests of him, who engages in this work of charity.

Such is the plan of providence, whereby we are rendered not only the instruments but the ministers of grace: The interposition to which we owe our redemption from eternal misery, being beyond all imagination, the highest example of this kind ever witnessed by men or angels: deriving its efficacy, not from any suspension of the Divine decrees, but from the operation of the same pre-established laws of God's providential government.

The Divine government, therefore, is not a plan of temporary expedients, multifarious in its nature, and contradictory in its parts; but one vast and uniform procedure; the laws of the moral as well as of the material world, proclaiming to the universe, the operation of the one God.

NOTE.

[A]

THE following judicious remark of Archdeacon Payley, seems applicable to the subject of this paragraph : “ When the doctrine of Transubstantiation had taken possession of the Christian world, it was not without the industry of learned men, that it came at length to be discovered, that no such doctrine was contained in the New Testament. But had those excellent persons done nothing more by their discovery, than abolished an innocent superstition, or changed some directions in the ceremonial of public worship, they had merited little of that veneration, with which the gratitude of protestant churches remembers their services. What they did for mankind was this : they exonerated Christianity from a weight which sunk it. If indolence or timidity had checked these exertions, or suppressed the fruit and publication of these enquiries, is it too much to affirm, that infidelity would, at this day, have been universal.”

In the spirit of this remark, we protest against the Calvinistic explication of a doctrine which the word of God has left unexplained : we object to it as exposing the whole of the Christian scheme to the attacks of infidelity : and not less for its tendency to repel multitudes of those who acknowledge the Divine authority of Scripture, from one of its most leading and influential doctrines. Such is naturally the effect of all per-

versions of the truths of religion, and such the tendency of human zeal. When men become offended at any such misrepresentation, they frequently recoil into the opposite extreme ; and whilst warmly engaged in opposing the errors of their adversaries, they are unconsciously led to give up some of the truths with which they have been intermixed. Thus, it cannot be doubted, that the popish doctrine of personal merits, so derogatory to the sovereignty of God, has done much to encourage the Antimonian or Calvinistic spirit, which in its zeal for maintaining the doctrine of God's free grace, unfettered by any claim of debt, has been led to regard his decrees as unconditional and irrelative. And in the same way, it may be presumed, that the Calvinistic scheme of redemption wherein the atonement is represented as a literal transfer of sin and merit, has, in no small degree, contributed to the Socinian and Arian heresies, by which the efficacy of the death and sufferings of Christ is reduced to that of their moral influence on the minds of his disciples.

Those who have led the way in any one line of error, have therefore a double account to answer : of those errors into which their opponents are propelled, no less than of those which themselves have inculcated. This reflection should teach us to approach the secret things of God with the profoundest reverence, to apply to ourselves the admonition of Agur on the subject of human presumption, as quoted by Solomon. " Every word of God is pure"—" add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar^a." His wisdom is truly unfathomable ; and what we are permitted to discern, bears no proportion to that which

^a Prov. xxx. 5, 6.

eludes our apprehension. But of all the Divine counsels in which we are concerned, that for the redemption of mankind by the sufferings and death of Christ would seem to be particularly distinguished by the wisdom no less than the efficacy of the contrivance: and accordingly it may be presumed, that there is none which leaves at a vaster distance the straining faculties of man. One apostle, speaking of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow, declares that these were "things which the angels desire to look into^b;" and another represents Christ crucified, as "the power of God, and the wisdom of God^c." Surely then, we may be persuaded, that any attempt to arrive at a full explanation of this deep-laid plan of deliverance, by connecting the cause and effect in a systematic theory, is not to raise our minds to the apprehension of things divine; but to bring down the counsels of God to the level of our superficial and vain conceptions. And what can be expected as the result of such audacious attempts, but those crude and ill-digested schemes, which are at variance, no less with common sense, than with the most sacred and saving truths of the Gospel?

Those who are satisfied to derive their information from that source of instruction, will find in it the supplies of all their wants: they will learn that God had determined from the beginning, to raise his creature man from the condition into which he had fallen, and to open to him the gate of everlasting life: that for this purpose of averting the consequences of his transgressions, and of placing him in a state of communication with himself, in the enjoyment of all spiritual assistance, the second person of the Godhead assumed

^b 1 Pet. i. 12.

^c 1 Cor. i. 24.

the nature, and entered into the condition of mortal man ; and having in that state submitted to privations and persecutions, and sufferings, closed his life on earth, by the Death on the Cross. That every part of Christ's mediatorial office was conducive to the ends proposed by the Divine goodness, cannot be questioned ; but his death is the point to which our attention is particularly directed, as being that in which the efficacy of the plan more especially consisted.

Such is the view, in which this great transaction has been exhibited by the Word of God ; and it is strictly and eminently influential ; being fitted to engender and sustain in us the Christian virtues of faith, or the lively apprehension of the magnitude of the interests to be secured ; hope, or confident reliance on God for their security, by assuring us that, he who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, will with him, also freely give us all things ; and love towards the supreme Being for his infinite mercies, which is the soul and animating principle of all acceptable obedience. And as it does not appear how the practical influence of this representation would be strengthened, by an exposition of the manner, in which the means employed become effectual for the purposes of God, any enquiry into this subject must be deemed no less presumptuous than hopeless.

But it may be asked, do not the Scriptures themselves offer an explanation of the efficacy of the sufferings of Christ, by the representations of it in the sacrificial services practised by the Patriarchs, and more particularly instituted in the Mosaic dispensation ?

Is it then proposed to judge of the antitype by the type ? The substance by the shadow ? It is, on all

hands admitted, that the slaughter of an innocent victim has, in itself, no visible connection with the ablation of sins, nor any effect of propitiation independent of positive appointment: and is it to this we shall reduce the efficient sacrifice of the Son of God, whilst we explain its nature by the Mosaic sacrifices, its figurative representations? This were evidently an inversion both of the things themselves, and of the order in which we judge of them. Every sound principle of reason would direct us to a contrary course. If we desire to know the nature and efficacy of the Jewish sacrifices, we should refer to the real sacrifice of the death of Christ; where we discern a being, who in mediating between man and his Maker, hath averted the consequences of his transgression, and opened the way to a blessed immortality, by a procedure which derives its efficacy from his incarnation, sufferings, and death.

But what, it may be asked, is then the use and import of the patriarchal sacrifices, or those of the legal covenant? They were types of the great and effectual sacrifice of the Son of God, and as such the institution was, in the highest degree beneficial both to those on whom they were enjoined, and to us for whose edification they have been recorded. Those by whom they were offered, were thereby impressed with a sense of their alienation from God, and of his merited displeasure, as also of the necessity of some method of propitiation, which he alone could devise. Coupled with the prophetic declarations concerning the sufferings and death of the being by whom their deliverance was to be effectually accomplished, they furnished no obscure indications of that great event; and no ineffec-

tual means of sustaining their faith in the promises of God, which were thereby to receive their accomplishment. As the connexion between the type and antitype, was more distinctly discovered, the sacrificial oblations would be more effectual for this purpose: and viewed in this light, reflected from the antitype, they would assume the nature of sacramental obligations, and become the lively expression of faith in the promises of God, and of dependance on the means he had provided for their fulfilment.

To us, to whom it is given, to compare these institutions, with the great object in which all the ordinances of Divine appointment unite, they carry more than the light of prophecy for the confirmation of our faith: harmonizing the different dispensations; exhibiting the unity of the Divine counsels, in the diversity of administrations; and proving that though man is progressive, it is the same God, by whom he is conducted to his final destination.

DISCOURSE IX.

PRACTICAL VIEW OF CHRIST'S MEDIATION.

JOHN xv. 13.

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

WE have already considered the subject of the mediation of Christ, as to its impetrative efficacy with the Father : and we have seen, that whilst in the Scriptural account of this matter, the things performed by him are distinctly specified, as well as the effect of these performances on the condition of mankind ; no assistance whatever is afforded, to those who would explain the manner of operation, whereby they become productive of the benefits thereby secured to us. It would seem, that the knowledge of the facts, was sufficient, for the purpose of those who with humility seek to profit by them ; and it is certain, that the Revelations which God has made to us, were not intended for the satisfaction of a vain curiosity. The world was to be turned “ from darkness to

light, and from the power of Satan unto God ^a." And agreeably to this gracious design, his instructions were strictly influential. Neither was the light afforded by his personal conduct, of a different character : whilst he complies with the wishes of his mother, he marks the irrelevancy of her demands, to the purpose of his mission ^b. He resists the intimations of Herod, who expected to have seen some miracle done by him ^c." And in the course of his temptations, he seems to have regarded an exertion of his power for any different purpose, as a sacrifice to the great enemy of mankind ^d.

On the whole : He who could have summoned to his aid, legions of angels, was never observed to resort to a miracle, for his own personal accommodation. He chose not to withhold from his followers, the benefit of his example, in those difficulties, by which they should ever be exercised ; but taught them by his conduct, " that man should not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God ^e." And it is no slight indication, of the source of that Wisdom, to which we apply for instruction ; that whilst it reveals to view, those glories of the Deity, which shed their light on the paths of duty ; it discovers to us nothing that is not applicable to this purpose.

^a Acts xxvi. 18.

^b John ii. 4.

^c Luke xxiii. 9.

^d Matt. iv. 1, &c.

^e Ibid. iv. 4.

Conformably to these observations, we should distinguish between the views of the Divine economy, as it relates to Him who hath contrived it, and to us who are to be governed by it.

The operation of the sufferings of Christ in effecting the purposes of his mercy, concerns the wisdom of Him, who hath chosen this method of our deliverance; and belongs to the upper side of the subject, which is at present averted from us. The discoveries thereby made, of the condition, the prospects, and the duties of mankind, are to be referred, to the light shed from that side of the same subject, which is nethermost and nearest to us. And to this latter view of our Lord's mediation, I shall confine myself, in what I now propose to offer for your consideration.

The due apprehension of our nature and condition, has ever been deemed one of the highest attainments of practical wisdom. To estimate fairly, our strength and our weakness; the heights to which we may reach, or the depths to which we may descend; is requisite for the formation of a right temper of mind; for the excitement of our vigilance, and the direction of our endeavours.

If the course we run in the present life, terminates in the everlasting salvation or perdition of our souls; how important is that lesson, which impresses on us, the sense of the interests to be secured, and of the dangers to be avoided? If our desires are low and sensual; if our affections are

contracted, and selfish ; if our resolutions are vacillating, our hearts deceitful, and our principles perverted ; how requisite to our ultimate security, is the penetrating sense, that such is the state of our moral constitution ?

But how are we to apprehend, that corruption, which is charged on our common nature, and the depths of the ruin to which it hastens ? Such being supposed to be our condition, we are necessarily incapable of discerning it, by a direct and immediate inspection : The faculty is wanting : It is to be discerned by an inward and spiritual sense ; and such as the spirit is, such also is the sensibility of its moral perceptions. This death-like insensibility, is the natural accompaniment of settled depravity. The poignancy of remorse, and the anguish of self-condemnation, can be felt, only where there is some degree of remaining vitality. It is only when we act below the standard of our moral constitution, that we feel for our error ; and conscience sounds the alarm, only when some new inroad is made by the powers of Satan : that post being surrendered, all again is the insensibility of death. This view of our inability, is altogether independent of the consideration of that complacency or dissatisfaction, we so naturally covet or avoid. The tendency of these, is to pervert the judgment and falsify its decisions ; that of settled depravity, to stupify our sensibi-

lity, and, thereby, deprive us of the very power of self-estimation.

But though we want the faculties for an immediate discernment of our spiritual corruption, we are not without the means of assuring ourselves on this subject. The very obstructions opposed to its tendencies and its progress, furnish a melancholy indication of the fact. But the most decisive proof of this corruption, and that which is, at the same time, the only measure of its depth, is to be found in the astonishing extent of the means employed for our deliverance from its dominion, and its consequences. We have only to think, that it was this that sunk the Lord of life, from such an inconceivable height of glory, into the abject condition of mortals; that delivered his body to be bruised, and brought down his spirit into the realms of death. The extent of this condescension what tongue shall declare? Yet this was not the whole of the sacrifice. It may not be well, perhaps, to offer any unauthorized conjecture, as to the cause of that mental agony which bedewed his frame with drops of bloody sweat; or the nature of that mysterious passion, when it seemed that God had, for a moment, forsaken him: but this we may well suppose, that as the defection of man, was the cause of his sufferings, so the contemplation of human depravity, was no small ingredient in the cup of his affliction. His abhorrence of sin was pro-

portional to his purity and holiness, and yet this was brought home to his spirit, by the operation of his fervent love for the objects of his commiseration. But, whatever may have been the more immediate cause of the anguish felt by him at this particular period ; this at least we know, that the corruption of man was the cause of all he suffered. How deep then, how active, how virulent, how destructive, that disease, which could require so wonderful a remedy !

Such an indication of our condition and our danger, were enough to fill the heart with dismay ; were it not that the incarnation, sufferings, and death of the Son of God, by which we are enabled to estimate the extent, and the consequences of human iniquity, are also the means of present redemption and future exaltation. It is in the face of Jesus Christ that we behold the glory of God¹ ; and it is only by the extent of his redeeming love, that we can arrive at any adequate conception, of the glory of that condition, to which he would exalt us. It is true, indeed, that though the promise of eternal life, which has been made to us in the word of God, were unaccompanied by any further demonstrations of his gracious intentions, this alone should be a sufficient ground of assurance. But something more than a general assurance, is required in aid of human infirmity : something which may en-

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 6 .

gage our imaginations, and thereby enflame our desires, enliven our hopes, and animate our exertions. But the circumstances of the condition prepared for us, are such, as human imagination cannot reach. We are expressly informed, that "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him^s." That "it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is^a." If this spiritual advancement consists, in an approach to Him who is the source of all existence, a nearer contemplation of his perfections, and a closer communion with his vivifying Spirit; our present conceptions, of the felicity of this condition, must necessarily be faint and evanescent. This defect of our present apprehensions of the thing itself, is supplied, in the exhibition of the means whereby it is procured for us: we cannot fail to believe, that the transmutation, shall be adequate to the extent of the means by which it is effected. Here is something more palpable; something to fix our wandering thoughts, and, through them, to engage our affections, and kindle our desires. Beholding the means, which the wisdom of God hath provided, for accomplishing the purposes of his goodness towards us, we are struck as if at the sight

^s 1 Cor. ii. 9.

^a 1 John iii. 2.

of the machinery, by which some great movement is to be effected : our conceptions of the intended work, are necessarily raised by the cost and magnitude of the preparations ; and our confidence in the intentions of the architect, respecting the performance of his engagements, is now founded, not only in the opinion of his veracity, but also in the actual observation, of vast preparations already made, and expenditures already incurred.

Such is the effect of the incarnation, sufferings and death of Christ, in strengthening our expectations of promised salvation. Here then we discern the foundation of vivifying faith, and soul inspiring hope. " Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen¹." But these are things, on which our thoughts could not be fixed by the most encouraging promises, were it not, that God himself, in condescension to this our weakness, hath exhibited to our view, the very instrument by which the door of salvation is unlocked ; the means, by which this wonderful deliverance is effected. Christ the power of God unto salvation, has been manifested, as he was actually engaged in this astonishing achievement ; by his atonement, averting the consequences of our iniquities ; and by his prevailing merits, securing those supplies of grace, which were to be the means of our advancement.

On this rock let us build our faith ; let it be

¹ Heb. xi. 1.

strong, solid, sober, rational, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it^k."

For the further confirmation of these glorious expectations, he hath made known to us, the nature of those helps he hath provided, in our progress towards this state of future exaltation ; even here, the process is to commence : even here, it is carried on by the supplies of God's holy Spirit, illuminating our minds, suggesting salutary reflections, purifying our affections, and strengthening our resolutions. But these communications are converted into our spiritual aliment, by a course of action ; and they constitute our spiritual strength, when we are enabled to proceed in our course, under their influence and direction. This is our part in the work of salvation ; and for effecting it, every facility has been afforded. The providence of the supreme Ruler of the world, is engaged, to render all the occurrences of this life, subservient to our security and advancement : we are assured that "all things work together for good to them that love God^l;" nay, that the very efforts of Satan for our destruction, are, by the overruling wisdom of God, converted into the means of accelerating our progress ; and that in his hands, the furnace of affliction becomes the instrument of our purification.

The penetrating conviction of the truth of this declaration, is requisite for the support of those

^k Matt. xvi. 18.

^l Rom. viii. 28.

Christian virtues, of patient submission to the hand of God in all his visitations, and of unreserved confidence in the wisdom of his providence in all his dispensations. Accordingly the Sacred Writers, not content with declaring to us their own assurance, have moreover shewn us how we may assure ourselves on this momentous subject. The infinite condescension of the Son of God, which proves to us the extent of our wants, proves also, that the Divine love is every way commensurate to our necessities ; and they have not neglected to make this use of the doctrine of the atonement. “ He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all ; how shall he not with him also, freely give us all things ? ” This argument is irresistible ; having such a proof of the extent of the love of God, we may well assure ourselves, that nothing will be withheld, which may be requisite for the full accomplishment of the purposes of his mercy.

The glory of God, as it appears in his redeeming love, is then that light by which we are enabled to look above us, and beneath us, and within us, and over all the extent of our interests here and hereafter. For these manifestations, we cannot be sufficiently thankful. It is true, that God might have done for us all that he proposed, without informing us on the subject of his gracious designs ; or exhibiting to our view, the me-

^m Rom. viii. 32.

thods, by which the purposes of his mercy are accomplished. He has pursued a different course, and our Lord has told us wherefore. "Henceforth," (saith he) "I call you not servants ; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth ; but I have called you friends ; for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you .." He treats us as moral agents, to be actuated by moral influences ; our actions are to be the result of our principles and affections ; and these again are formed by the representations addressed to our understandings. In pursuance of this method, he hath revealed to us the depths of his counsels, and the extent of his measures, manifesting thereby the effulgence of that glory, by which faith is lighted, and piety is kindled ; and the soul with all its sentiments, feelings, and affections is converted to its Maker.

But how is this faith to be exerted, or this piety to be expressed ? God cannot be benefited by our exertions, nor can our aid be required for the accomplishment of his designs. We have from our Lord himself this objection, with its answer, " Lord, when saw we thee an hungered and fed thee ? or thirsty, and gave thee to drink ? when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in ? or naked, and clothed thee ? or when saw we thee sick, and in prison, and came unto thee ?" This is the question of the supposed objector, to

ⁿ John xv. 15.

which he answers, " Verily I say unto you; inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me °." Such is the scope afforded, for the exercise of those affections, which have God for their object; and such the method, by which it is ordained, that we should advance in his spiritual kingdom. The lessons of our Divine Instructor, do not, like the counsels of human wisdom, profess to decide between the conflicting claims of our natural desires, or to guide us in the crooked paths of worldly policy. Those who apply to him for direction in such matters, will be disappointed. To the petition, " Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." He replies, " Who made me a judge, or a divider over you ?" " Beware of covetousness P." The tendency of his instructions, is to disengage the affections from self: teaching us to be submissive, forgiving, merciful, liberal: to seek for safety, in making others the objects of our concern; and for happiness, by directing our efforts to the well-being of our fellow-mortals. " Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth °," is the direction of his Apostle. " This is my commandment," (saith the Redeemer of mankind) " that ye love one another, as I have loved you °." This, indeed, is " a new command-

° Matt. xxv. 37, &c. P Luke xii. 13, &c. ° 1 Cor. x. 24.

° John xv. 12.

ment'." A new road of self advancement. Neither philosophy nor religion, had, ever before, taken such comprehensive views of the interests of mankind; neither, had ever before attempted to recommend that super-human charity, which "seeketh not her own": to tell us, that "who-soever will save his life shall lose it". That the way to aggrandizement, is by self-abasement; and that the only method of promoting our own felicity, is by doing all for the happiness of others. Such however, is the spirit of Christian morality; and lest it should seem to us chimerical or unattainable, it has been exhibited to us in the glorious example bequeathed for our imitation. To this example, your attention is called by our Lord himself, in the words of the text, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." The whole of his mediation is one continued display of that soul-expanding love, which leaves no room for the operation of any inferior motive of action. It was on this errand of charity, he descended from the realms of bliss, where he reigned, one with the Father, the glorious God and Maker of the universe. To accommodate himself to our conceptions, he shrouded his glories in a veil of flesh; and thus attired, he entered into the perishable abode of man, and dwelt among us: and having in this form, exhibited to our senses, the living image of

^a John xiii. 34. ^b 1 Cor. xiii. 6. ^c Luke ix. 24.

charity; comprising, within its unbounded range, every virtue of purity and meekness, patience and humility, moderation and forgiveness, exercised by the keenest sufferings; he closed his ministry of redeeming love, by offering up that life upon the cross.

Vain were the attempt to declare the extent of this goodness. Who may comprehend it, in its "breadth, and length, and depth, and height?" St. Paul himself, perceiving how inadequate the powers of language to express the magnitude of our debt of gratitude, drops it from him, with this simple declaration, that it "passeth knowledge *," leaving it to the Spirit of God, to bring home to our hearts, what his Holy Spirit alone could entertain.

Let it not be supposed, however, that I rate too highly the privileges of the Christian, by proposing for his imitation the unlimited charity of the Saviour of mankind. His impetrative office with the Father, none else perhaps in heaven, could have discharged; but the treasures of divine love, which were thereby provided, he hath conferred on us, not only to enjoy, but to dispense. Having entrusted us with the means of promoting the happiness of our fellow mortals, both here and hereafter, he hath exalted us to the rank of agents and stewards in his household: this is the high office to which we have been

* Ephes. iii. 19.

called. The subject matter has been provided in the condition of man, and the multiplied relations of society ; and the most powerful assistance to our apprehensions, as well as the greatest encouragement to our exertions, have been supplied by his example. Let not false humility prevent us from following this sacred light, which shines round the person of our Redeemer. On the subject of this imitation, we are not only encouraged, but commanded. "I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you ; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven ; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect ^v."

Indeed, the dignity of the person who is the Captain of our salvation, seems not more requisite, to obtain for us the privileges he hath conferred, than to instruct us in their use by his example. In vain would the Unitarian assert, that a Being of less dignity, were equal to this part of the Saviour's office ; or that a mere creature, if divinely commissioned, must be conceived to be a sufficient medium of communication, through which might be transmitted every advantage of

^v Matt. v. 44, &c.

instruction, whether by precept or example. Who does not perceive, that this were to place before the eyes of man, an agency, which, instead of facilitating the communication with his God, must distract his attention, and perplex his moral sentiments? That a Being, who lays us under a debt of gratitude, surpassing even that which we owe on account of our creation; whose spotless example demands our unceasing regard; and whose purity and holiness, and infinite charity, draws to him every sentiment and affection of the heart; is indeed the object of our adoration? This Being, who is himself the light and life, and health of our souls; to whom, as to its end, every interest is ultimately referred; and before whom, with every faculty of our nature, we bend in humble prostration; can be nothing less than our God. That we should stand in this relation to any created being, however exalted, were a practical contradiction. He would, and he would not, be the object of our worship; the consideration of the vast inferiority of the creature, serving to check the effusion of our moral sentiments, and instead of suffering the soul to ascend on the wings of a holy devotion, ever calling back the mind, to the solution of an intricate problem: To apportion the veneration and attachment, respectively due, to the first Author of our being, and to the gracious Mediator in the covenant of mercy.

Accordingly, God, though he undoubtedly uses the ministry of angels for the accomplishment of his designs, never proposes them as objects of distinct apprehension. It was not the image of angelic natures, but the image of God, that was effaced by sin : and this is the image again to be revived. Neither is the God of the Christians a Being of metaphysical inference ; but a God meeting every faculty of perception : that engaging the affections of the soul, through all its powers of apprehension, he might raise us to holiness and perfection. “ Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace^z.” Grace, corresponding to every trait of the Divinity, which shines through the human form of the Redeemer. The God therefore whom we serve, is not a mere abstracted holiness, displayed by the exertion of faculties far beyond the reach of all temptation ; but embodied in our nature : to shew how, even weighed down by infirmities, and encompassed by temptations, we may rise to moral perfection ; greater, perhaps, than if, by the possession of higher endowments, our difficulties had been diminished : so that it behoved Christ, were it for this purpose only, to stoop from his throne, even into the depths of human infirmity ; to enable us to rise superior to the difficulties and trials, to which, in consequence of such a nature, we must be exposed : for so the Scripture saith, “ it became

^z John i. 16.

him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.*

Yes, my fellow Christians, it is your God you behold, walking before you the journey of human life : planting his footsteps in the most arduous and trying situations, through which any of us shall ever be required to pass. Even in the most abject condition into which you can fall ; in poverty and persecution, nay, even in the extremity of bodily suffering, should such be your portion, when perhaps the companions of your former fortune have fled, and no earthly hand is outstretched for your assistance, no friendly consolation imparted to temper the bitterness of your afflictions, you may enjoy the tender sympathies of your Saviour ; and repose on his sustaining arm, who hath established a way, even through the same region of sorrow, to life eternal. Yes, my friends, even here in the shadow of death, you will recognize your God : his glory was, indeed, eclipsed, (though the testimony of nature was not wanting to his universal sovereignty) : but in this general resignation of his physical powers, did the fervor of his charity suffer any abatement ? This was that essential quality, that could not admit of change or sus-

* Heb. ii. 10.

pension ; for " God is love .," Even agonized on the cross, where he meets in his own person the consequences of our transgressions, he suffers not to pass, without improvement, an opportunity which offered itself, of illustrating by his example the relative duties, by which, we stand engaged ; committing his earthly parent to the protection of that disciple, whose pious attachment to his person, and the comparative tranquillity of whose future life, best qualified him for such a charge : " Behold," said he, " thy mother .," Nay, even these last breathings of his parting spirit, were sent up in supplications to the Father, for the forgiveness of his enemies ; whose foul deed of murder, was blackened by every act of persecution and mockery, which insolence and malice could suggest. " Father," said he, " forgive them, for they know not what they do ."

O, my friends, how different is this spirit, from that unchristian pride, which visits with death, any encroachment on its vain pretensions ? How different from that envy, which measuring its own exaltation by its distance from all around it, perceives in the fame or fortune of others, its own debasement ? How different from that cold and repulsive selfishness, which concentrating its affections within the compass of its own little being, sacrifices the interests, perhaps

^b 1 John iv. 8.

^c John xix. 27.

^d Luke xxiii. 34.

the eternal interests of God's creatures, to its own ~~fin~~ced aggrandizement? Alas, blind and mistaken man ! The way to aggrandizement, is by the imitation of him who washed his disciples feet : the imitation of his expansive charity ; combining within its glory, every virtue of humility and meekness, of patience and gentleness, long suffering, love unfeigned, unwearied benevolence : the imitation of him, who, when he yielded to persecution, turned the very opposition of his enemies, into the means of accomplishing the purposes of his mercy : who suffered the malice of the world to pour out his soul in death, that he might burst the bands of sin and death, and establish a way to life eternal : who, when the victory of satan seemed most decisive, rose to supreme dominion ; having obtained at the hands of the Father, the government of the world, and the treasury of heaven, that he might draw, from thence, what supplies he might deem necessary for the purpose of his unbounded charity.

Such is the course marked out by the Captain of your salvation ; and such, principally, seems to be the nature of your reward in heaven : a reward, consisting in the enlargement of the sphere of exertion, of those very qualities by which it was obtained. The struggle with temptation will no longer be protracted : Satan will, then, no longer maintain his hold on your affections, or assert his claim to your allegiance : and the term

of painful discipline shall then have passed, never more to return. You will then be transformed into the image of the living God, and your employment will probably consist, in the exercise of those perfections which constitute that resemblance. The powers of mind and body; those feeble instruments of an infant spirit, in which you now are wont to glory; even these shall be changed: "for whether there be tongues, they shall cease, or whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away; for we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away^c." Nay, even many of our moral virtues, as peculiarly pertaining to a state of discipline, shall cease, with that state of imbecility, of which they were the support: faith shall end, in immediate apprehension, and hope in perfect enjoyment; but "Charity never faileth^d." Here its exercise, in a great measure, consists in that subjugation of the selfish affections, which constitutes the passive virtues of humility and long suffering: there it will be exhibited in active benevolence. "I appoint unto you a kingdom," saith our Lord unto his disciples, "as my Father hath appointed unto me^e."

Would to God, that we could reflect on these things; and instead of silencing the voice of a drowsy conscience, apply ourselves to this sacred

^c 1 Cor. xiii. 8, &c.

^d Ibid.

^e Luke xii. 28.

light, to discover what no man's conscience can naturally suggest ; and in the extent of what has been done for our recovery, learn to apprehend, the depth of that perdition, from which we are enabled to escape, and the height of that glory, to which we are invited to aspire. That we could live in the alarming recollection, each, that he himself is the object of this awful, this stupendous plan of mercy ; nay, that he is called on to take his part in its execution ; called on to co-operate with his God : to be at once an object and an actor in this wondrous scheme. These things are inseparably joined together ; nor is it possible to arrive at eternal happiness, but by our activity in dispensing the blessings we possess on earth, and by our zeal in conducting to those we expect in heaven. This is the part to which we are called by the constitution of nature, and the voice of the Gospel : and this is the part in which we are instructed by the example of our God. It is not the execution of his decrees in the works of inanimate matter, to which you are invited : it is not the superintendence of those worlds that roll through the immensity of space ; but of that superior world of immortal spirits, for which these things were called into being, and for which the Maker of these things laid down his life.

And shall any of us abuse this delegated power, to subject to the dominion of sin, a Being, for whose deliverance, such an inconceivable effort has been

made by his Redeemer ? Shall we, by any inconsiderate act or word, suffer ourselves to become a stumbling-block, to turn him aside from the way of salvation ; and whilst we grapple for the advantages of this life, shall we rouse the malignity of his selfish affections, by making him feel the iniquity of our own ? or shall we, by the immorality of our lives, cloud from his view the light of that example, by which alone, his course should be directed in peace and safety ?

O, my young friends : you I regard as, in a peculiar manner, the stewards of the manifold grace of God. It shall be the business of many among you, to distribute the bread of life ; and on your exertions, rendered effectual by Divine assistance, will depend, (as far as we can perceive,) the everlasting happiness of many of your brethren : your remissness may be the occasion of their never ending ruin ; and shall any consideration of earthly advantage, urge you into a service of such tremendous responsibility ?

But let me forbear to press on you, the wickedness of thus rendering the truth of God, subservient to the calls of mammon : or to insist on the corruptness of those motives, from which, every ingenuous mind must revolt with horror and disgust. Far different are the sentiments, which the duties of the sacred office are fitted to impress, on all, whose consciences are not entirely stupified by vicious habits, or whose principles

not yet overthrown by the heat of worldly pursuits.

When the minister of the Gospel, surveys the multitude, who come to hear from his mouth some lesson of heavenly wisdom ; to be edified and assisted, in their endeavours to understand and to perform the will of God ; it is difficult to suppose, that he should not be impressed with an alarming sense of the duty he has undertaken. When he beholds sinners like himself, resorting to him as the steward of the mysteries of God : the flock of Christ seeking, at his hand, for spiritual sustenance ; and the heirs of salvation, for light to direct them in their Christian course, for assistance to combat the power of satan, and shake off the yoke of his oppression ; it is difficult for the language of mortal man to describe the emotions, which belong to a situation at once so awful and inviting. It is, indeed, a situation, which a zealous minister may covet, for the multiplied blessings it enables him to dispense : yet when he considers, how disproportionate are his qualifications to an undertaking so exalted in its nature, so important in its consequences, so terrific in its responsibility ; he naturally feels inclined to shrink back from the task, with holy dread ; and, like Moses, when commissioned to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, to ask of his God, “ Lord, who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and bring forth the Children of Israel

out of Egypt^a.” This is the feeling, which will naturally be excited by the awful magnitude of the sacred charge. It is a dread over, which, nothing should prevail, but the same urgent command of heaven, approving itself to your hearts by a holy and fervent zeal. If this zeal be not wanting, be of good courage. Your sufficiency is of God. “who is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we can ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us¹.”

^a Exod. iii. 11.

¹ Ephes. iii. 20.

DISCOURSE X.

ON PRAYER AS MEANS OF GRACE.

LUKE XVIII. 1.

And He spake a parable unto them, to this end, that men ought always to pray and not to faint.

AMONGST the various characters of goodness, by which the life of our Redeemer was distinguished, we may justly include his condescension to the weakness of human apprehension. By representations most familiar to the imagination, the dealings of a mysterious Providence are brought down to the level of our understandings, and the sublimest lessons of practical instruction are constantly impressed on our hearts. Of this the parable alluded to in the text is a distinguished instance.

The parable, with the application, runs as follows :—“ There was in a city, a judge which feared not God, neither regarded man ; and there was a widow in that city, and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary, and he would not for a while, but afterwards he

said, within himself, though I fear not God, nor regard man, yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, hear what the unjust judge saith : And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them ?”

The object of our Lord in this parable, has been specified in the text by which it is introduced. It was to encourage us in the habit of Prayer, by assurances of an answer to our petitions, certain though perhaps deferred, and favourable, though surely unmerited. And what can be conceived better fitted to afford us this encouragement, than the representation here made to us, of the difficulties which may be surmounted by ordinary perseverance ?

Imagination cannot picture a character, naturally more impenetrable to the voice of supplication, than that which is here exhibited. Here is no regard to the principles of justice ; no partiality for truth ; no feeling of compassion ; no indignation at unmerited persecution ; no regard to public opinion, the usual substitute for moral principle ; no fear of punishment in this life or the next, to induce him for his own sake, if not for that of the wretched sufferer, to interest himself in her behalf. Destitute of those affections, by which the worst of men are sometimes actuated, every avenue to his heart seems to have been

guarded by a love of ease profoundly selfish, which was ever ready to repel, as if it were an aggression, any application which might disturb his repose. By what argument or entreaty could the distressed widow expect to excite his attention? The difficulty here represented, was great indeed: yet even this difficulty, great as it may appear, yielded to that perseverance, by which the interests of this world are commonly pursued. And is it to be supposed, saith our Lord, that there shall be found greater difficulty, in prevailing with the God of Mercy for the supplies of his Grace, if sought for with earnestness and perseverance, corresponding to the value of the subject of our petitions?

The argument were strikingly convincing by whomsoever urged: but proceeding from that Being, by whose mediation our prayers shall be accepted; we are not to view it merely as an argument proposed to the understanding, but as an assurance addressed to our faith; the positive engagement, of Him, in whose hands are the things of Eternal Life; sufficient to excite our most sanguine hopes, and to demand our most strenuous exertions.

The exhortations contained in Scripture on the subject of Prayer, are without number: and the force with which this duty is pressed upon us, is not exceeded, by that which accompanies the delivery of any other precept. We should therefore na-

turally suppose, that the practice of this duty were particularly suited to the condition of man ; and when united to the mediation of Christ, particularly efficacious in procuring those supplies of Grace, of which we stand in need. Let us enquire wherein consists this suitableness and efficacy : from such considerations we shall be the better enabled to apprehend the reasons of its continual enforcement, and to deduce such remarks as may be requisite for our direction.

The word Prayer, though it chiefly implies supplication, yet is it by no means, either in its primary signification, or its common use, confined to this act. In a larger sense, it is extended to the act of adoration, in which the spirit of man fills itself with the wonders of the power and the goodness of God ; blessing his holiness, and tendering the tribute of its praises and thanksgivings for his providences and his mercies. It implies also, those expressions of penitence, wherewith the soul confesses its iniquities before its Almighty Judge, and those pious resolutions, whereby it dedicates itself to the service of its Maker.

And if Heaven had assigned no other duties, which of these would be insufficient for the engagement of the mind of man ? Are his iniquities, his incapacity, his obstinacy, his rebellion, his emptiness, his ingratitude, fitly expressed by a cold or occasional acknowledgment ? Is his de-

pendence on God, and his need of the outflowings of his goodness, to be made the subject of a lifeless petition, begun with reluctance and dispatched in haste? Does his need of amendment, lead only to a transient and infrequent intercourse with that Being, with whom are the supplies of spiritual strength? Are the subjects of thanksgiving and praise of rare occurrence? Or rather does not every incident, afford a proof of his Providence; and is not every moment added to our lives, a new instance of his mercy? In the endless ages of the life to come, are there not sufficient grounds of hope and apprehension, occasions of endless supplication, thanksgiving, and praise?

In speaking of the suitableness of continual prayer to the condition of man, I feel the vanity of any attempt to convey an idea of the vast extent and importance of the subject. If, on the one hand, the weakness and depravity of our nature; and on the other, the unbounded mercies of God; if the blessings of creation and continual safeguard,—if the wonders of redeeming love,—if the depths of Hell and the joys of Heaven, do not furnish endless occasions of disquietude, anxiety, hope, fear, joy, and sorrow, to be sent up to God in expressions of confession and self-condemnation, of supplications, adorations, and thanksgivings, I know of nothing that should excite these emotions in the soul of man.

If all things were done for us, independently

of any exertions on our own parts, still would this homage be just and reasonable : for it will be readily admitted, that the sentiments with which we regard the beings by whom we are surrounded, should correspond to the relations they bear to us ; and that if our state, with respect to God, is that of continual and absolute dependence, for all that we enjoy at present, or expect hereafter, unquestionably our thoughts should be ever directed towards Him, with sentiments of grateful and pious acknowledgment.

But the practice of Divine worship is but partially considered, when we deem it nothing more than a becoming acknowledgment of our dependence on God. It is the great duty of this life ; it is the effort of the soul for the attainment of life eternal ; for its escape from everlasting destruction. The mediation of Christ is indeed the only ground of our hopes ; but this must be sought for : we must approach Him in the spirit of repentance and of prayer ; according to that invitation, " Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest *." He is the way and the door, by which alone our petitions can find admittance to the throne of Grace ; but if our prayers do not ascend thither, neither can our souls ascend thither.

Those who are tinctured with the principles of Antinomianism, will no doubt find it difficult to

* Matt. xi. 28.

reconcile what has been intimated in the text, relative to the prevailing efficacy of Prayer, with their notions of the unconditional determinations of God ; or with the immutability of his nature, and the perfection of his wisdom and goodness. " In Him is no variableness or shadow of turning," nor is He like man that he should repent. He knoweth whereof we are made, and derives not his information from our confessions. His infinite goodness must incline him to bestow, unsolicited, whatever is meet for us ; and no less resolutely to withhold what is unsuited, however earnestly we may pray for it.

These objections, which are destitute of all solidity, do not deserve a more ample statement, nor shall the reply be more copious.

When we speak of the efficacy of Prayer, as means of Grace ; we do not suppose that God is informed of our necessities, of which, but for our supplications and cries, he should have been ignorant ; that the earnestness of our entreaties can unsettle his determinations, or the pitifulness of our representations can move his compassion : —no, my friends, these weaknesses are human, and have no place in the nature of that God whom we serve, the same yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow ; our merciful Father, seeking every opportunity we afford, of conveying a blessing to our souls.

But though God is unchangeable, man is not

so ; and what He may deem proper to withhold from us, in a certain state of our dispositions and affections ; his wisdom may deem fit to bestow on us, when our minds are in a different condition with respect to their spiritual capacities : and it only remains for us to consider, how Prayer is fitted to bring us into that favourable condition.

Now the efficacy of Prayer, considered as means of spiritual advancement, consists, in its being an exertion to bring home to our hearts, the truths we profess to believe, and thereby to give them a suitable influence on our lives and conduct.

And surely, when we reflect on the sentiments and feelings, inseparable from an address to the Almighty ; we cannot be at a loss to conceive, how it becomes to us, the most efficacious means of confirming and strengthening all religious impressions.

Our sentiments respecting ourselves are formed by comparison : scarcely is any thing known to us absolutely ; and nothing less than our own nature and condition ; we must help our conceptions, in this respect, by looking beyond ourselves : and as we direct our regards above or below us, we become acquainted with our deficiencies, or possessed with the sense of imaginary excellence. Hence the influence of example good and bad. By fixing our regards on men of probity and public spirit, our notions of duty are exalted ; and by fa-

miliarizing our thoughts with the proceedings and principles of men of an opposite character, there is much danger, that we may be, thereby, induced to lower the standard of moral rectitude. This influence of the characters of those with whom we converse, is much augmented, by the frequency with which they are brought before us; what we perceive but seldom, may pass away without making any lasting impression; but if the character be, such as fixes our imaginations, by the intimacy of connection, or by the possession of any attractive qualities, either natural or adventitious, the effect on the observer, is frequently too marked to pass unnoticed.

Such being human nature, it will readily be imagined, that if the Being who is the subject of our contemplations, is that Great and Holy One, whose eyes are too pure to behold iniquity; that if this be the object with which our thoughts become familiar; that if He is thus, not merely in himself, but in our imaginations, about our bed, and the companion of all our ways; the sentiments of the heart and the principles of conduct cannot remain unreformed.

The soul of religion is the fear and love of God: and the practice of religion is the living to God. Prayer, therefore, which brings to him, the heart, with all its thoughts, sentiments, and affections; brings it to the well spring of life, in which our spirits are purified and invigorated.

His Almighty power; his eternal existence;

his unfathomable wisdom ; are fitted to fill not only the inhabitants of earth, but of Heaven, with admiration and awe. He is also our Protector, our Deliverer, and our Judge : He is therefore the supreme object of our fear and love. He is presented to us in every relation of Creator, Benefactor, Sanctifier ; as the Author and free Dispenser of all that we enjoy or hope for : He is then fitted, not only pre-eminently, but exclusively, to exhibit by his nature and his will, the rule of life, and the model of excellence, to which we should aspire.

In the act of adoration, the sword of the Spirit is most sharp ; and we feel its power to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit ; and to the extirpation of all our natural and in-bred corruptions. In approaching the light of his countenance, the fiends of Hell abandon their hold of us ; their power is overthrown, and their work demolished. This is easily understood ; for as we appear before that Being, who is holy, and of whom it is said, that “ the stars are not pure in his sight,” “ behold, even to the moon, and it shineth not^b,” self-abasement and awe, are the feelings, which necessarily belong to the consciousness of such a presence. Our weakness, our imperfections, and our transgressions, which we are so prone to palliate or forget, then rise up before us in judgment ; and the heart together

^b Job xxv. 5.

with the knee, is bent to the dust before him : we then become duly sensible of the odious nature of sin, and are filled with holy indignation against ourselves for all our misdoings.

It is absolutely inconceivable, that we should ever obtrude our vices upon the eye of God, for any other purpose, but for help to war against them. What miscreant ever dared to solicit the great God, to favour his iniquitous designs, or to assist him towards the gratification of any impure or unlawful passion ? Things so repugnant to the nature and will of God, perhaps, never have been made the subject of any petition addressed to him. In the very supposition there is something so monstrous, that until an instance is adduced, it must be deemed impossible. The most abandoned of mankind, must feel, that to make the Almighty a party to their resentments, or a pander to their evil affections, is to set up an impure idol in their hearts, and to call upon the holy God to serve in his temple : an impiety, which cannot fail of exciting the abhorrence of Him, who represents himself to us, as a jealous God. It is understood by all, that though he humbles himself to our capacities, he never thus accommodates himself to our carnal affections : that he is unchangeable in holiness ; and that the soul which would communicate with him, must shake off the filth of those natural dispositions, which belong to the world and the flesh, and pre-

sent. itself before him, filled with the desires of those spiritual blessings, by which it is to be renewed in his likeness.

Prayer then, in which the spirit of man holds a direct communication with his Maker, is the life of religion : its fuel ; its nutriment ; its support. It is the exercise of every Christian sentiment, which can purify or exalt the human heart. It is an exertion of faith, of love, of fear, of repentance and self-abjuration, of religious hope and religious joy :—in fine, Prayer is the ascent of the spirit and affections to God ; which, by frequent communications, must be permanently fixed in Heaven, before that ever soul or body can be conveyed thither.

Without the practice of Prayer, we may indeed regard our unworthiness with shame and sorrow ; and contemplate the justice and mercy of God, with the mingled sentiments of fear and love : but these silent contemplations are in themselves languid, and therefore liable to be interrupted by other objects, which are ever ready to engage our senses and affections. Prayer more effectually raises our minds to God, by a direct and solemn address ; it fixes our senses, by the use of speech and posture ; and combining the faculties of soul and body in the one act of devotion, it withdraws us from the influence of temptation, and the wiles of the Devil, and suffers the spirit of peace to take the undivided possession of our souls.

On the contrary, should we deny ourselves the benefit of this practice, we throw away from us, the whole of that armour, which God himself hath furnished for our Christian warfare; the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation. No object present, when vice would overtake us, to rouse us from security; to awaken us to vigilance; to awe us by his power; to attach us by his loveliness; to shame us by his holiness; the torments of Hell not being present to our apprehensions, nor the joys of Heaven to our hopes; and our natural weakness being unaided by those supplies of spiritual strength, which are necessary to enable us, to combat those things whose influence is present, and strong and pressing; we readily fall the unresisting victims of the Devil, and are led precipitate down the steep way of destruction.

From this view of the efficacy of Prayer, it must appear, that sincerity, fervency, and perseverance, are conditions implied in all that has been said of its advantages. It is only of "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man," that it is said it "availeth much."

The fervor of our desires, and the earnestness of our pursuits, should ever be suitable to the magnitude of the object, and the difficulty of its attainment. But the things proposed to us in the Gospel, are those on which God himself has set

* James v. 16.

the highest value : they are the chief effects of his love ; the purchase of his blood ; the gifts of his saving mercy ; and the only conditions of happiness.

These are objects, not only worthy of our earnest desires, and most vigorous exertions, but not attainable without them. " The kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force^d," is the language of the Redeemer of mankind, when he would designate, in a manner suited to our comprehensions, the nature of the efforts, on which God bestows his spiritual blessings. And that such efforts should be requisite, will not appear surprising, to any one who knows that the promises of God, are confined to those who apply themselves to the use of the means confided, with diligence suited to the difficulties to be surmounted. But here the work to be accomplished, is not only the most important ; it is also the most difficult : it is nothing less than a change of our nature, from all that is low and carnal, to the image of God himself. I do not say that for the efficient cause of this change, we are to look to man, or to any exertions of his powers. The operating principle in this and every good work, is undoubtedly the spirit of God himself, and this only ; but it is equally certain, that the effect is to be produced, by the use of the means he hath confided ; and

^d Matt. xi. 12.

that our diligence in the application of these means, to be successful, must bear some relation to the difficulty of the work to be accomplished. Now a man may change his external condition, but to change his moral nature and internal dispositions, is a work of a very different kind. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do well that are accustomed to do evil." It is not a lifeless and formal Prayer, that will avail for this purpose: for as the change respects the heart and affections, so must the prayer, by which it is to be effected, proceed from the bottom of the heart: this is the seat of the disease; and accordingly here the remedy must work: hence proceeds the religious torpor, which pervades the entire system; and accordingly here must the exertions be made, to preserve itself from total death; to procure the quickening supplies of the Spirit.

The Prayer which does not proceed from a spirit, convinced of its wants and elevated by faith, beyond the influence of this world, into the presence of God; does not bring the spirit of man in contact with his Spirit, if I may use the expression. Such a communication can work no effectual change on the heart, and is therefore justly said to be a mockery of Him, who wills not that his name should be pronounced, but with lips sanctified by holy and fervent devotion.

* Jerem. xiii. 23.

Nay ; it is not enough that our prayers should be accompanied with heartfelt desires ; but these desires must also be coupled with exertions. The communications of grace, are rarely sufficient to over-rule our propensities ; but are always, when applied for, enough to assist our endeavours and confirm our resolutions. Therefore, prayers for deliverance ; unless accompanied with active repentance ; with strenuous efforts ; with self-suspicion and self-controul ; with an application of all those means and an exertion of all those powers, already furnished by Divine Providence ; cannot be supposed to fit us for any further assistance, or for any new supplies of Grace. When with our lips we profess ourselves the servants of God, and yet make no effort to release ourselves from the dominion of sin ; when we profess to trust in his mercies and receive all from his bounty, and yet abuse these bounties of Providence to minister to our passions ; we may, perhaps, persuade ourselves that we worship the Lord ; (for what degree of self-deception is too gross for the heart of man ?) but, in truth, we mistake the transient sentiments of the mind, for the dedication of its affections ; and yet these transient sentiments of devotion, are perfectly consistent with the most abandoned and irretrievable state of sin.

The state of our affections and dispositions, may be infallibly known to us, by the course of our actions, and the nature of our pursuits ; and

if these be unprincipled or worldly, the former cannot be virtuous or holy.

Nay, so great an enemy to our devotion is sinfulness ; that indulgence in any one sin, utterly destroys the effect of our prayer. An habitual sin, is the refusal of our affections to God ; and a preference given to some idol of worship. That prayer is not an exercise of love, which leaves the affections with any earthly object ; it is not the suggestion of religious fear, that suffers the soul to linger in the dominions of Satan ; it is not an exercise of faith, which does not lay all at the foot of the cross. It is the contaminated breathing of a besotted spirit, which would join the worship of God to that of Belial ; that casts a look towards Heaven ; but would not for its attainment, resist the invitations to carnal indulgence : that would compound with God ; by resigning what it little values, for the promise of eternal life ; but would forego even life eternal, for the gratification of a sinful passion.

Hence few desire to pray, because few desire to forsake their sins ; except perhaps in the moments of terror, when the fear of death, or of something more dreadful after death, impels them to sue for mercy, who never sought to make themselves fit for pardon. Hence of the few who pray at all, fewer still attain the end of their petitions : their supplications are not the effusions of the heart, and therefore do not act on the

heart; do not contribute to the reformation of its affections.

Effectual Prayer, is the breathing not only of a pure and earnest spirit, but also of a patient spirit. As devotion, is not a task reluctantly begun; so neither is it hastily dispatched, or seldom renewed: it is the intercourse of the soul with its Creator and Judge; by which, his friendship is cultivated, and his assistance procured: it is an application to its Redeemer and Sanctifier; by which the spirit is to be revived, strengthened, and prepared, for the condition to which He would exalt it. The practice of this duty, therefore, to be effectual, should be habitual. This will be evident, from the slightest consideration of the nature of the work to be effected.

The state of the mind, whatever it be, is the effect of habit: it is the result of the habitual direction of our thoughts, imaginations, and actions; by which, such a tendency is given to the mind itself, that on the slightest impulse from its favourite objects, it is put into its usual train of thinking, willing, and acting. Such habits, if they are bad, must be reformed: and to be reformed, they must be supplanted by other habits; and by none so effectually, as by the habitual direction of our minds, to the source of all spiritual life and strength, in the exercises of devotion.

It is not to be supposed that Pharasaical devotion is here recommended; long prayers in public;

or frequent interruptions of the duties imposed by our respective occupations. But surely, it is no obstruction to the discharge of our duties, that the spirit of Prayer should be kept alive: that whilst our hands are toiling in the duties of our stations, our regards should be fixed on Him, who hath assigned to us, our worldly task; and allotted to us the station, which, to his unerring wisdom, seemed the most favourable to our Christian progress. Surely, the Apostle does not mean to detract from the rectitude of our aim, or the vigour of our exertions; when he directs, that in the most familiar actions of our lives, whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we should do all to the glory of God.

But whilst this paramount obligation is made to accommodate itself to our worldly concerns, it is not to be understood, that we are authorized in appropriating to temporal uses, those days, set apart by the laws of God or the rules of the Church, for the celebration of his praise, or the application of his mercy. This prime duty of life, at all times sanctifying and spiritualizing our temporal employments, must not be so confounded with them, as to be denied its seasons of distinct and separate attendance. The times set apart by the command of God, or the rules of the Church, for the joint petitions and praises of the assembled flock, cannot be neglected, without contempt of that heavenly King, to whom we are

then called on to tender the tribute of our adoration ; without a disregard of the public good, which may be benefited by our prayers, or by our example ; and under these aggravating circumstances of guilt, the disregard of the most efficacious means of Grace and of our soul's salvation.

I am not aware that this remark, however important, requires to be insisted on. All will acknowledge, that every community is founded in the notion of a common interest among its members ; and that no where can this community of interests be so truly presumed, as in the religious concerns of mankind ; in which they have to deal with their common Creator, and Benefactor. Their essential wants are common : the means of Grace are common ; and eternal life is offered to the hopes of all in common. Here are no conflicting claims ; no interfering interests. Here therefore is no ground for rivalry, or jealousy, or contention. These can have no place in our addresses to Him who wills our common salvation. Nay, the opposition, which is engendered by our worldly competitions, is sacrificed at the foot of his cross, who gave his life a ransom for our common deliverance ; and who requires that we should follow the example of his most perfect love, in the use of all the means he should confide, and of all the opportunities which his Providence should afford us. The members of the Church of

Christ constitute but one family, in which indeed

there are many departments and offices. This, however, is no separation of views, aims, or interests; but only such a subdivision of labour, as is calculated to draw them more closely together, in the discharge of their relative duties; and to secure to them more effectually, the end in which all are equally interested. The propriety, therefore of uniting our hearts and voices in the exercise of solemn and public devotion, will not be questioned.

But, independently of its obvious propriety, this practice is recommended by positive and peculiar advantages. Public devotion is peculiarly fitted, to fix our wavering minds and fluctuating thoughts, by its impressive solemnity: an effect, to which, the example of those with whom we are joined in the same exercise, cannot fail to contribute. The intensity of our affections is powerfully augmented, by sympathy with those who are engaged in addressing the same Being, on the same subjects, and in the same expressions. The social affections too, are purified and invigorated by the spirit of religion; and after the solemn dedication of ourselves to God, and the acknowledgment of His will, as the regulating principle of our lives and actions; we separate, better members of society, better disposed to the conscientious discharge of its various obligations; and thus the Spirit of peace which is

solemnly invoked on the Sabbath, descends to enlighten and to sanctify the earthly paradise, which God hath given us to inhabit, and commanded us to cultivate.

In rulers, who unite in the same professions with their subjects, public devotion is fitted to produce humility, arising from a sense of continued dependence on the supreme Ruler of all : a love of justice, of mercy, and of truth, in their dealings with those whom he hath committed to their government, and who are, equally with themselves, the objects of his care, partakers of the same privileges, and heirs of the same promises.

On subjects, it operates in a manner equally beneficial, by infusing the love of order and of peace ; and by inculcating a principle of conscientious obedience, to those who are set in authority over them. Thus the connexions of the members of society, are cemented, and all are knit together in the bonds of mutual charity. In a country, therefore, where men are nurtured, in the principles which are so efficaciously impressed by public devotion, it is impossible but that order and good principle should prevail. Where laws are respected, for conscience sake, and not from the selfish views, of the interest which each party may have in their observance, the measures of enforcement will be necessarily mild, and the exercise of arbitrary power unknown. The rigours of positive enactments,

which, after all, cannot reach the disorders of the heart, are superseded by the law of God, written within the heart, and disposing each individual of the community, to the faithful discharge of those duties of his station, by which he is to contribute his share to the general prosperity.

But besides the sabbath, there are other seasons, which have been ever regarded, as peculiarly fitted for intercourse with God in prayer. The commencement of the day, before that we are involved in the tide of worldly affairs, is such a season. It is, as it were, the commencement of a new existence, after being awakened from a temporary death ; and is, therefore, highly favourable to spiritual refreshment, from devout reflections and aspirations. Such an exercise, at that season, is attended with a peculiar blessing on all our subsequent employments ; it prepares the mind for the engagements which follow ; it sanctifies our pursuits ; it fixes our principles ; it invigorates our good resolutions ; it animates our exertions ; and furnishes us with motives, of power to preserve us, from the sinister influences by which we are beset ; it kindles a light within us, which amidst the storms and vexations, incident to the occupations of the day, may guide us in peace and safety to its close.

The end of the day, as being the termination of a marked portion of our existence, is also another season peculiarly fitted for solemn reflection

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on our spiritual concerns. The survey of our conduct during the day that is past, and the estimation of the progress we have made, towards that day, on which no sun shall set, will be then our employment, if we have any thoughts of immortality. Such meditations, followed by a commendation of our souls to God, in the confident reliance on his watchful providence, cannot fail to renew whatever may have been decayed in our principles or affections; to render us more guarded and better fortified against future perils; and to open our hearts to the vivifying influences of His Spirit, who will raise us with renovated strength, not only from the sleep of the approaching night, but from the sleep of death.

If religion be at all our concern, these seasons of devotion will not be neglected. The religious duties which so plainly belong to them, are those, from which, neither age, nor sex, nor occupation, nor any consideration whatever, can absolve us.

But were I called on to name any description of persons, whose situation demands a more peculiar attention to the performance of this duty, both in their own persons, and of those under their controul; next to the pastors of the flock, who, by their profession, are engaged especially and almost exclusively, to attend to the spiritual concerns of others, I should point to the fathers of families. Every father, from the earliest times, has, in his own family, exercised the office of

priest : nor has the establishment of a distinct order, which has appropriated many of its functions, at all absolved him from the duty of religious superintendence. The frequent opportunities he enjoys, of noting the manners, the dispositions, and the deportment of the members of his household ; the affection which responds to parental tenderness, and the fear inspired by parental authority, give him an advantage within his own house, which marks it as the place, where he can most successfully promote the glory of God, and the salvation of man.

Neither do these advantages on the one hand, exceed the demand for them on the other. In them, we see the provisions, which infinite wisdom has made for the weakness of infancy. The tenderness of youth, without external assistance, is unable to struggle with temptation ; and when it has fallen, it possesses no principle of self-recovery. To protect it from error and vice, it requires the support of principles, carefully instilled, and habitually strengthened, in a course of religious education ; and of the encouragements and apprehensions, which are to be kept alive, only by the constant communication with God, in Prayer.

Nor is there any degree of success, which under the blessing of Divine Grace, a parent may not expect, from attention to the practice of family devotion. Youth, though weak and prone

to fall, is not naturally disingenuous. Sincerity is the quality first impressed by the hand of God on his work, and it is the last which is effaced : it is, as it were, the last article of value, extorted from a youth, by the embarrassments into which, vicious pursuits are ever sure to lead him. On this principle, therefore, parental power should take hold. Let the regards of a child be constantly directed to Heaven in Prayer, and his affections will not remain behind.

Such is the harvest which may be gathered to the Lord, by those who dedicate themselves and their families to his service, in the habitual practice of morning and evening devotion. And suited to the magnitude of the consequences of its observance, is the obligation to the discharge of this duty. The religious education of youth, is a charge the most sacred that Heaven has assigned to us : and every parent should feel himself accountable to society, for those principles in his offspring, which constitute a useful citizen ; and to God, for those virtues which make him a true Christian.

DISCOURSE XI.

ON WORKS CONSIDERED AS MEANS OF GRACE.

MATT. III. 10.

Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

SUCH is the decisive language of the Baptist, in enforcing those precepts, by which he would prepare his countrymen, for the coming of their expected Messiah. He, indeed, was not that Christ; nor was his doctrine characterised by the same spirituality, or accompanied by the same power, as that of the great Teacher, who should shortly appear amongst them. He baptized with water; but afterwards should come one mightier, who should "baptize them with the Holy Ghost and with fire^a." "He was not that light^b" which should come into the world. He, therefore, only requires of them, to order their lives, by the lights which they had already received. The publicans he exhorts, to avoid exaction; the soldiers, to abstain from violence; and all men, to bring forth

^a Luke iii. 16.

^b John i. 8.

fruits meet for repentance : to put away their evil doings : to lay under restraint their carnal and uncharitable affections : and thus, as far as in them lay, to remove every obstruction, which might bar their admission into the spiritual kingdom of God.

Many and great were the obstructions to be removed, not only of moral corruption, in which they were not behind the other nations of the world ; but of local prejudices peculiar to themselves. They had Abraham for their father, whose faithfulness was to be the shield of all his posterity ; not, perhaps, from the attacks of their spiritual enemy ; but from the vindictive anger of the Almighty : and their claims to peculiar favor, seemed to be confirmed to them, by the express promises of God himself. Of this partial favor of heaven, they deemed that a sufficient proof was already given to them, in being made the depositaries of the law of God. It is true, that a law had been given them, comprising many positive institutions ; which were deemed requisite for that gross-minded people, to turn them towards God, and to the mode of deliverance he had proposed, by the redemption which was to be wrought for them in Christ Jesus. This last purpose of the positive law of Moses, was long lost sight of ; and the ceremonial observances, instead of leading them to God, by preserving them in the practice

of the moral law, became a substitute for all the essential duties it enjoined.

Their supposed interest in the righteousness of Abraham, and their inalienable claims to the promises of God, made on that account to his seed, were alone sufficient, to render them proof against every impression, tending to moral reformation. Accordingly, we find the Baptist engaged in driving them out of this false security. "Think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able, of these stones, to raise up children unto Abraham."

But their persuasions respecting their peculiar privileges, however delusive, were innocent, compared with the notions in which they indulged, respecting their claims on the justice of the Almighty. They imagined, that by their observances of the law, they were entitled to challenge the benefit of the promises, as matter of right; and cherished a spirit of self-dependence, agreeable indeed to this persuasion; but in the highest degree, unsuited to the nature of fallen man, and to the sovereignty of that God, to whose approbation they seemed to aspire. Their pretensions to peculiar, or even to exclusive favor, however absurd, in their nature, and dangerous in their tendency, were yet consistent with the feeling of dependence on the Divine mercy: but claims

* Matt. iii. 9.

to reward, preferred against God himself, amount to nothing less than downright rebellion against his unlimited power, and the rightful authority by which it is freely exerted. Even on the extravagant supposition of sinless obedience, we should fail to make out a title to the continuation of our present existence ; and how much more to the enjoyment of that which is offered to our hopes in the Gospel? “ If Abraham was justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God ^d.” If, instead of distinguishing himself from his fellow-mortals, by his comparative righteousness ; he had answered the demands of heaven, by the most complete obedience ; still, even he should have prostrated himself before the throne of God, in humble confession, that he had not exceeded the limits of his bounden duty.

By persuasions, thus opposed to the spirit of the Gospel, the greater part of that people were naturally led to reject the counsel of God, against themselves : and no less, to resist the extension of his saving mercies to the Gentiles. So deeply rooted were these prejudices, respecting their claims to the peculiar favor of God, as the posterity of Abraham, and heirs of the promises ; that they could not imagine any danger to themselves, or hope for their fellow-mortals. Any other discourse might have been tolerated by the multitude ; but on the slightest allusion to the calling

^d Rom. iv, 2.

of the Gentiles, all patience forsook them. To Paul they gave "audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, away with this fellow from the earth : for it is not fit that he should live. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, the chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle *." Some of them had, indeed, overcome these prejudices, so far as to associate with the disciples, in the profession of the Christian faith ; yet even these could not be convinced that their institutions were merely preparatory to the introduction of the new covenant ; or that the Gentiles could be admitted to a participation in the blessings of the kingdom of the Messiah, on any other condition, than that of adopting those ceremonies, which they had so long regarded as the distinguishing mark of God's people. They saw in Christianity, nothing more than a reformation of their national religion, whereby, it was shortly to be raised to its state of promised aggrandizement ; and were so far from being prepared for the abolition of those institutions, by which it had been conducted towards this state ; that they still clung to them, as the means, not only, of conciliating the favor of God, but of establishing a claim on his Justice.

These opinions, by which the preachers of the Gospel were so much impeded in their ministry,

* Acts xxii. 22, 23, 24.

are frequently alluded to, in the writings of the New Testament : but for their most ample refutation, we naturally turn to those of the Apostle of the Gentiles ; and there we find them discussed, with all the powers of argument and language, with which he was so eminently gifted.

In opposition to their notions of exclusive privileges, he demands ; “ is he the God of the Jews only ? Is he not also of the Gentiles ? ” On the same topic, he reasons with them out of the Scriptures : shewing them that “ they are not all Israel which are of Israel ; neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children ; but in Isaac shall thy seed be called ; ” that is, (as he explains it,) “ they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed . ” And lest they should distrust the validity of his reasoning ; he directs them to the prophecies, relative to the calling of the Gentiles, and their reception into the kingdom of the Messiah. “ For this cause, I will confess to thee among the Gentiles ; and sing unto thy name. And again, he saith, rejoice ye Gentiles with his people : and again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles, and laud Him, all ye people : and again, Isaias saith, there shall be a root of Jesse, and he shall rise, to reign over the Gentiles : in Him shall the Gentiles

^c Rom. iv. 29.

^e Ibid. vii. 6, 7, 8.

trust^b.” He shews them, that the possession of the Law, by which they seemed to be marked out, as the objects of God’s peculiar favor; so far from being a subject of boasting, only served to aggravate the guilt of those by whom it was violated. That the inheritance was not to be of the Law. “For if there had been a law given, which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the lawⁱ.” The meritorious sacrifice of the Son of God, would not have been offered, as it could not, in that case, have been required: but the law was not fitted to produce any such effect; inasmuch as it was “weak through the flesh^k.”

In opposition to these statements, the privileged Jews would naturally object; “Wherefore then serveth the law?” To which the Apostle answers, “it was added, because of transgression^l”; i. e. it was given, that by revealing the will of God, it might shew them the extent of their transgressions against it; and so convince them of the power of sin, under which they were kept in bondage. “For by the law was the knowledge of sin^m.” “The law was given, that the offence might aboundⁿ.” And by producing these convictions, whilst it pointed to the great object of hope, it “was their schoolmaster, to bring them unto Christ^o.”

^b Rom. xv. 9—12.

ⁱ Gal. iv. 21.

^k Rom. viii. 3.

^l Gal. iii. 19.

^m Rom. iii. 20.

ⁿ Ibid. v. 20.

^o Gal. iii. 24.

Having thus reasoned with his Jewish brethren, on the subject of their boasted privileges ; the Apostle proceeds, in opposition to the presumptuous notion of merit, and the daring impiety of preferring any claim on the justice of God, to preach to them, the doctrine of grace, and salvation through faith.

He assures them, that “ by the deeds of the law, shall no flesh be justified ^p.” That salvation, is by the free (*i. e.* by us unmerited,) grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. “ Now to him that worketh, is the reward not of grace, but of debt ;” but “ to him that worketh not, but believeth in Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness^q.” The doctrine of the Apostle, therefore, is, that salvation is of the free and unmerited goodness of God : it was of his infinite goodness, that he proposed to himself, the present deliverance, and future exaltation of the fallen race of Adam : it was of his unbounded love, that He spared not those means, though of inestimable value, by which, the purposes of his mercy, were to be accomplished. Moreover ; that the inheritance, thus intended and provided for us, is conveyed to us through faith. Being of grace, it is through faith ; which is a reliance on the gratuitous mercies of God, and the mode of salvation which, of his unmeasured goodness,

^p Rom. iii. 20.

^q Rom. ii. 4, 5.

He hath established. This sense of our absolute dependence, and of God's infinite mercies, is the true sense of our relation to him : it is by these convictions, that the human soul is brought nigh to its Creator and Redeemer ; placed in a state of communion with his Holy Spirit ; and enabled to answer the demands of the law, by a filial and spiritual, though still imperfect obedience. Faith, therefore, is the condition to which these benefits are awarded, by that judicial act of our sovereign Judge, implied in the term Justification : and whilst we are saved by Grace, we are justified through Faith.

These representations of the Apostle, were indeed called forth by the prejudices of the Jewish converts, respecting their privileges, or their merits : but their value is not to be limited, by the uses for which they were more immediately intended. " Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning^r." And as the places, above referred to, contain an exposition of the most vital doctrines of Christianity, it will always be of the highest importance, that they should be rightly understood.

The errors there opposed, are not peculiar to that self-deluded people. Human nature, however various the characters impressed on it by the circumstances of its condition, is still, internally, the same : its corruptions are the same ; as also

^r Rom. xv. 4.

the artifices, by which conviction is stifled, and the calls to reformation resisted. The satisfaction of self-complacency, is naturally coveted by the heart of man: and the notion of personal merit, is most soothing to its vanity. When the powers of self-deception, fail to administer this consolation, no other means will be rejected, which promise to afford, even a temporary relief, from the pangs of remorse. The notion of privilege, is a ready substitute for that of personal merit; and no sooner are the supports of self-righteousness, withdrawn; than their place is supplied, by those which are derived from the notion of the partial or peculiar favor, of Him, to whom we are accountable. Such persuasions will ever be cherished, whilst human nature continues to be weak or corrupt.

Even in this Christian country, on which the light of the Gospel has so long shone; and where its saving truths have been so zealously inculcated; our attention is called to those very errors, which had been so decidedly condemned by the word of God.

On the one hand, we recognise the advocate of works; who attentive, only, to those outward manifestations of Christian principles, seems to overlook that internal spirit, to which they should belong: who not considering, that Christianity is a religion which takes its abode in the heart and affections, stops at the mere letter of the com-

mand; and placing all his dependence on his performance of the duties enjoined by that letter, imagines that, in some things, he may so far exceed the limits of his duty, as to lay up in heaven a superabundance of treasure, to be placed to his account, under those heads, wherein his obedience may be found defective.

On the other hand, the intelligent Christian will not fail to notice the opposite error, of those, who in maintaining the sufficiency of what Christ has done, imagine that he has left us nothing to do: who affecting to abhor the arrogance, of claiming any merit in the work of their own salvation, inculcate the sufficiency of a mere speculative belief, in the person and offices of the Redeemer. These are the privileged Christians, who assert that man is not required to labour for his salvation; for that, in truth, he can do nothing: that by the all-sufficient and infinitely meritorious sufferings of Christ, the work is not only begun, but finished; for those, whom God hath unconditionally elected: and that should an unregenerate person attempt to gain the Divine favour, by any attention to his religious or social duties; any exertion of piety or charity; he must incur the crime of making a Saviour of himself and of his own performances; and thereby, add to the overwhelming load of his natural guilt, and, if possible, to the depth of his perdition.

The error, nay, the guilt, of a self-righteous dependence on external performances, is pointed out, by the articles of our reformed Church, so as to render any additional precautions on that head, here unnecessary; but the progress, which the Antinomian doctrines have lately made in this part of the world, furnishes an alarming proof, that our holy faith is not equally secure on that side. Let it be remembered, that no misrepresentation of the doctrines of Scripture, can be innocent; no departure from its principles can be immaterial to our progress or our safety. It is acknowledged by us, that the notion of personal merit, is a wide departure from the spirit, and the saving influence of the Gospel: let us contemplate, with no less aversion, the scheme, which would seduce us from the paths of practical religion; which offers the widest range, to those, who under the pretext of Christian liberty, may be ready to throw off every encumbering duty of morality; and who affecting to rest, solely, on the righteousness of Christ, would make of that "liberty, a cloak for maliciousness".

The state, in which the mind is left, by the weakness, or the absence of religious principles, is not the only condition, which is favourable to the dominion of the grosser passions. The most sacred truths of Christianity, have been joined in alliance, with the worst propensities of human

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 16.

nature. In such cases, religious principles, frequently, supply new fuel to the passions; and stimulate them to atrocities, from which, he that is governed by the principles of a mere worldly morality, shrinks back, with disgust or with horror. Such is the nature of fanaticism; and the system, which would abstract us, from a due regard to our duties, is the religious ingredient in such a character. It has only to meet with a sanguine temperament, and corrupt inclinations, to make, in the eyes of the world, that monstrous exhibition, which brings religion into disrepute, and renders the mere profession of it, a byeword among the irreligious part of mankind. Accordingly, those who know the power of human passions, to distort and pervert the plainest truths, will not be surprised to find, that a scheme, so indulgent to all our natural propensities, has never wanted its abettors; and that being of late, inculcated with zeal, worthy of a better cause, it has spread most alarmingly among us.

It must be painful to dwell on errors. The task of unfolding and enforcing truth, is, in general, not only more grateful, but also more profitable, than that of guarding it against misrepresentation: the latter, however, is sometimes called for; and when called for, we should ill discharge the duties of our office, were we to confine our labours to the ordinary administration of the comforts of religion. The waters of life

B b

whose healing influence we dispense, must be guarded against all contamination. And as this may constitute no inconsiderable part of your duty my younger friends, who are intended for the work of the ministry, it will be incumbent on you to anticipate the attempts of the enemy, and to provide yourselves betimes with that armour by which they may be successfully resisted; that you may be able to transmit to others inviolate, the spiritual treasure with which you shall be entrusted. Indeed, against every attempt to substitute doctrine for duty, and opinion for practice, common reason might be sufficient for your purpose; if in any case, fanaticism would listen to the admonitions of reason: for it is obvious, that a scheme of redemption, which disclaims all human co-operation, might have been carried into effect, without any revelation of the will of God for our direction; any manifestation of his incarnate Son, for our imitation. Nay, it might be added, that according to such a scheme, the invitations, so numerous in the pages of Scripture, to draw nigh unto God, would be a mockery of human imbecility; and the declarations of solicitude respecting our present course, perhaps altogether unintelligible.

But arguments of reason, are of no avail, with those, who think themselves called on to darken the lights of natural reason, which would exhibit the deformity of a sectarian system. The

authority of the word of God, is paramount to all other authority : and by it alone they will consent to be judged. It is well that they profess this respect for the word of God. Would, that in its interpretation, these professions were realised : that this reverence for the sacred volume, were manifested, by discretion in the exercise of their judgment ; and timid self-distrust, in their own powers of apprehension. For assuredly, it is not to the bold and presumptuous spirit, that the Gospel will unfold its mysteries. Such a one will fasten on a doctrine, without adverting to the abuses to which it is opposed : a representation, without attending to the doctrine to be inculcated ; and perhaps a single premise of an argument, without any regard to the conclusion to be established. And the things, to which the attention of every candid enquirer, would naturally, be most forcibly directed ; are those, which, in this way of interpretation, are never looked after, and but seldom attended to.

What then is the course adopted by such interpreters ? are particular passages viewed in connexion with the general tenor of the Scriptures ? or of the writings of the same author ? or with the context ? or with the subject of the discourse ? On the contrary, and by the most perverse method of Interpretation, particular sentences are detached from all that could throw light on their import : and on these, so consi-

dered, certain doctrines are established, to which, the whole body of evangelical truth is to be accommodated.

When such as these set up for guides, who themselves require to be led; and disregarding that which God hath levelled to their capacities, as being requisite for their safety, boldly venture into the most difficult parts of the Sacred Writings, for the articles of that faith, with which, they are to enlighten the minds of their fellow-mortals; the consequence is that which might have been easily anticipated. The unity of the faith is dissolved; the bonds of peace are broken; and the Christian world, instead of being united in the same mind and same spirit, under the same Lord and Master, is divided into a multitude of petty communities, separated from each other, by discordant views, feelings and interests.

Were I called on to name that portion of the Sacred Volume, which more particularly requires the exercise of a discreet and penetrating judgment, on the part of its interpreters; I should select, with the consent of all readers of the Scriptures, that which was written by the Apostle of the Gentiles. The sweep of a mind so ardent, capacious and discursive; which seizes so forcibly on its subject, and represents it so powerfully; embodying a number of representations to break down a false opinion, or to establish the truth; and a variety of arguments, in support of the

same conclusion ; is not to be perceived by a microscopic eye, in mutilated sentences, severed from the context. It is with no ordinary exertion of thought, that we can hope to keep pace with the movements of such a mind, as with comprehensive views and intuitive discernment, it pursues its course through parenthesis within parenthesis, and argument within argument ; combining the most heterogeneous materials into one body, and directing their accumulated power on the same point. Without receiving from the Apostle, some portion of the Spirit by which he was, himself, animated ; we shall not perceive the bearing of his statements : and this being unobserved, the force of his expressions cannot be duly apprehended. If he vindicates the goodness, or sovereign authority of God, in calling the Gentiles to the knowledge of his will, and the benefits of the Gospel Dispensation ; and this, in opposition to the most illiberal and unchristian prejudices of his Jewish brethren, respecting their privileges, as the seed of Abraham, and sole inheritors of the promises ; he is supposed to inculcate the doctrine of arbitrary decrees, and unconditional election. If he preaches the doctrine of God's free grace, in opposition to the notion of personal merit ; and justification by faith, to those who depended on their own unaided strength, to answer the demands of the Divine justice ; he is supposed to proclaim to

sinner, the sufficiency of a mere speculative religion ; safety without self-watchfulness : faith without morality : redemption without reformation. [A] Writings of this character, are peculiarly liable to such abuses ; and therefore, to perverted minds, peculiarly attractive. To these, the speculator in religious theories, will ever resort : here, fanaticism will seek to entrench itself : here, the sectarian polemic, will hope to furnish himself, with arms for attack and defence ; and the aspiring leader, with the means of confirming his party in their allegiance, or of winning over new proselytes to his standard.

But it may be demanded, were not the writings of St. Paul addressed to the Christian public, for their edification ? And is this portion of the New Testament, now to be sealed, from all who seek for religious knowledge ; and this in an age so much more enlightened ? Such is not the tendency of the representations I have made : nor are they to be so understood. It is true, that these epistles were directed to the Christian public ; but it was a public, already provided with the commentary, in the errors of opinion and of practice, which prevailed, in the churches to which they were respectively addressed. When the Apostle applied himself to correct those errors, and reform those abuses, the bearing of his representations could not be generally misapprehended : and it might be presumed that the doc-

trines, by which they were enforced, were scarcely liable to unintentional perversion. Undoubtedly, the primitive Church was provided with a powerful help for the interpretation of these writings. But it is one of which we also may avail ourselves. Let the doctrines of the Apostle be now received, with the comment furnished by himself, in their practical application ; and we also, may hope to imbibe their genuine spirit. Let them be applied for the correction of the kindred abuses, of the times in which we live ; and we too, shall be secured in the possession of the faith, in which we have been instructed. And thus protected against the chief causes of misapprehension, let us follow the writer in his views and reasonings ; and perhaps there is no portion of Scripture, from which we shall receive more abundant supplies of spiritual and saving knowledge.

But whilst the example of those, for whom these writings were more immediately intended, may serve for our direction and encouragement ; let it also awaken us to the danger, arising from indiscretion or temerity : more especially, as we have received this admonition from the Holy Scriptures themselves ; wherein we find, that these writings had not been many years in circulation, before that they were wrested, in support of a system of opinions, by which the morality of the Gospel was to be undermined. The remarkable language of St. Peter, complaining of

these perversions, by men unqualified for the task of interpretation", is not the only Apostolic testimony we have to this melancholy fact. The Epistle of St. James carries internal evidence, that he also applied himself, to correct the abuses of the same parts of Scripture: for when he would convince us, that an assent to the doctrines of the Gospel, if not followed by holiness of life and conversation, is altogether unprofitable and dead; and when in contradistinction to this, he recommends that operative principle of faith, which subdues the strongest natural affections, to the will of God; he places before our view, the example of Abraham, who, in obedience to the Divine command, hesitated not to offer up his only son Isaac; shews how the testimony of God to the faith of the Patriarch, was supported by his conduct; and then insists, that it was by his works, and not by mere faith, that he was justified*. Here we have the example of the same individual, and the same passage of the Old Testament, recording the testimony of God to his faith, which had been already adduced by St. Paul; and a conclusion derived from the whole, not indeed varying from that of this latter Apostle, but directly and expressly opposed to those Antinomian inferences, which, certain expositors would derive from this part of the Epistle to the Romans. [B]

* 2 Pet. iii. 15, &c.

* James iii. 21, 22.

Such a comment by one Apostle on the writings of another, should be sufficient to set at rest the Antinomian controversy for ever : to satisfy us, that when St. Paul insists, that it was Abraham's faith, which was imputed to him for righteousness ; the justifying faith of which he speaks, is not a mere assent of the understanding, to the truth and certainty of God's promises ; but a soul-enlivening, energetic principle ; which beginning with the understanding, penetrates the heart ; regulating the principles, exalting the affections ; completing its work, and establishing its dominion, by directing every movement of the will, and ordering every particular of the external conduct, in strict conformity to the commands of heaven. In fine, that what St. Paul advances against the carnally-minded Jew, relative to his false and presumptuous dependence on his outward observances, is not to be understood to signify, that our pious endeavours to conform to the will of God, may be dispensed with : or that what he delivers, respecting the acceptableness of Christian faith, may be applied to a barren assent of the judgment, to the evidence laid before it.

But why appeal from the Apostle, usually referred to by the Antinomian ? Who more zealous than he, in enforcing the principles and practice of Christian morality ? Who more explicit, in setting forth the fruits of patient continuance in well-doing ; or the consequences to be

apprehended, by those who disobey the truth^a? Who more powerful in encouragement, to “run with patience, the race, that is set before us”? Does he not warn us, that “if we live after the flesh, we shall die:” and assure us, that “if, through the Spirit, we do mortify the deeds of the body, we shall live?” And does he not confirm, by his own example, what he had delivered to others, respecting the necessity of the strictest attention to these warnings: telling them, that he found it necessary, to keep under, his body, and bring it into subjection; lest, by any means, when he had preached to others, himself should be found a cast-away^b?

But it will be said, that all this belongs to one view of the subject; and that view merely external: that an interior view of our holy religion, has been also afforded; which carrying us beyond these rudiments of Apostolic teaching, enables us, if adepts, to restrict the declarations, adapted to the comprehension of those, who had not been already imbued with its more spiritualizing principles. That the same Apostle has assured us, that “by the deeds of the law shall there no flesh be justified^c,” and that “man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law^d.”

Now this, indeed, is a most spiritualizing truth

^a Rom. ii. 7, 8.

^b Heb. xii. 1.

^c Rom. viii. 13.

^d 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^e Rom. iii. 20.

^f Rom. iii. 28.

to those who profit by it. But to receive from it any benefit, it must be understood : and when understood, so far from restricting the force of the former declarations of the Apostle, it will, I doubt not, be found to impart additional strength, not to them alone, but to every precept of the Gospel. But to see the bearing of the expressions above referred to, it is necessary, again to consider the scope of the argument, in the places to which they belong. By turning to those places, we shall find that the question which the Apostle applies himself to determine, is not, whether we can be saved without righteousness: this had been already decided in the negative, by himself, as it had been before, in every page of the Gospel ; and he repeatedly recurs to the same decision. The enquiry, in which he is there engaged, relates to another point in the scheme of salvation ; viz. the source of that holiness, without which, no man can see God ; and this he shews to be, nothing else, but the Christian faith.

In establishing this doctrine, he was encountered by the most inveterate prejudices of his Jewish brethren, respecting the possession of the law, and the supposed merit of their observances. It was, therefore, necessary for him, to beat them out of these persuasions, so adverse to the spirit and power of Christianity. He shews them, that

these were the obstructions, by which they had barred against themselves, the entrance into the spiritual kingdom of God ; into which, the Gentiles, who were prevented by no such hindrances, were more freely admitted. " What shall we say then ? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore ? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone ; as it is written, behold, I lay in Sion a stumbling stone, and rock of offence : and whosoever believeth on him, shall not be ashamed. Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record, that they have a zeal to God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God*."

In the former part of the epistle, he had already shewn, that the possession of the law, served only for the manifestation of natural corruption, not for its reformation. In this he had stated nothing, that is not confirmed by universal experience ; which shews that the knowledge of duty,

* Rom. ix. 30, &c.

is widely different from the inclination which leads to the performance. Therefore whilst the force of his representations, on this subject, is chiefly directed against the Jews, they are not limited by him to that self-willed and blinded people. His statements extend to the moral law, or that knowledge of the will of God, imparted to the Gentiles, by the light of nature; and though these were not so ready as the Jews, to rely on their fancied claims, in the spirit of self-dependence; yet they also are included, in the declarations he makes, concerning the inefficiency of law, to restore, in fallen man, the image of his Creator. The experiment had been already made, The knowledge of the will of God, was imparted by the light of natural reason, to the Gentile, This had failed. A more perfect revelation, had been made, to the Israelites. This only served to shew, by its stronger light, the depths of human corruption. Wherefore he concludes, that “by the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified^f.” It could not be otherwise. The knowledge of the law, not having power to release from the dominion of sin, could only serve for the conviction of the sinner.

Now it is at this point, in the progress of the argument, that the Antinomian stops short. Having gained, as he thinks, this admission from

^f Rom. iii. 20.

the Apostle; he values it too highly, to risque the advantage, by accompanying him any further. He would have found, that the Apostle was, here, only clearing away the rubbish of human errors, in order to erect the sacred edifice of Christian morality : that this was to be established on the foundation of Christian faith ; altogether on faith : “ for therein is the righteousness of God,” (*i. e.* the righteousness which he regards with complacency, and which he will accept,) “ revealed from faith to faith.” The Antinomian will, indeed, subscribe to, what he conceives to be, the Apostle’s doctrine of justification by faith ; but having already found, that by the knowledge, or the deeds of the law, shall no flesh be justified ; he looks to faith, not as the support of morality, but as the substitute for all moral virtue. And thus, by a singular perversity, the doctrine which the Apostle labours to establish, that of justification by the righteousness of faith, is rejected : and that which he condemns, respecting the efficacy ascribed to the mere knowledge of the Divine will, and the form of godliness, in those who deny the power thereof, is that which is embraced and eagerly defended.

It is in vain, that the Apostle disclaims the doctrine here imputed to him, “ What shall we say then ? shall we continue in sin, that grace

‘ Rom. i. 17.

may abound? God forbid^b!” And again, “What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid! Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey. Whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness^c.” And again, “What then? Do we make void the law through faith? yea, we establish the law^d.” he establishes it, by providing an efficacious, and vital principle of obedience. Thus, we find him guarding the sacred truths of practical religion, from the aggressions, which, he foresaw, would be made upon it; defending the doctrine of free grace, from those, who would use it to undermine the sense of moral obligation; and the kindred doctrine of justification by faith, from such as would use it for the subversion of Christian morality, of which, it is meant to be the sure and sufficient support.

Surely, these safeguards should be sufficient for our protection, against all error on the subject. Against unintentional error, they will suffice: but against that perversity which belongs to human corruption, what will avail? The Apostle foresaw that his representations would not. He has expressly foretold it—“This know also, that in the latter days, perilous times shall

^b Rom. vi. 1, 2.

^c Ibid. vi. 15, 16.

^d Ibid. iii. 31.

come, for men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection ; truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof : from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women, laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth¹." It is perfectly natural, that such as these should turn away their eyes from the precepts of Christianity, to what they misrepresent as its doctrines : and to condemn the preaching of Christian morality, as unchristian and heathenish. To such vain speculators in religion, let us oppose the direction of the Apostle, " This is a faithful saying ; and these things I will that thou affirm, constantly ; that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good, and profitable unto men ^m."

In vain it is urged, that these practical influences on the dispositions and affections, are the necessary and infallible results of a sincere profession of the truth ; and therefore, that any such

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 1, &c.

^m Titus ii. 8.

distinction, between an active and a merely speculative faith, is unfounded or uncalled for. He who contends for this harmony between the will and the judgment, should contend, not for exclusive, but for universal salvation; inasmuch as the necessity of such an agreement, would leave no room, even for the possibility of transgression. But in truth, my friends, he who maintains the necessity for this accordance, between the affections of the heart, and the convictions of the understanding, is most lamentably deficient in the knowledge of our unhappy nature; nor is he less grossly ignorant of the Scriptures, wherein the wrath of God is revealed against those "who hold the truth in unrighteousness". "If I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains," (saith the same Apostle,) "and have not charity, I am nothing". And again, when describing the condition of a spirit enslaved to sin; he supposes not a deficiency, in the knowledge of our interests, or our duties, but the strength of ungovernable affections. "To will," (saith he,) "is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I know not: for the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" This then is a state, very possible

^a Rom. i. 18.

^o 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

^p Rom. vii. 18, &c.

according to the Apostle Paul : very possible, also, according to the Apostle James ; who speaking of the emptiness of such faith, puts the question, " What doth it profit, if a man say he have faith, and have not works ? can faith save him ? " And proceeds to ask, by way of illustration, " If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, depart in peace, be ye warmed or filled ; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful for the body, what doth it profit ? even so faith, without works, is dead, being alone."

But time would fail me, were I to attempt a reference to the various passages of Scripture, which serve to shew, that the belief of the doctrines of Christianity, is not, necessarily, accompanied by the affections or principles, which should belong to that profession. And that the faith, which does not perfect its work in obedience, far from offering a foundation for hope, serves but to aggravate the guilt of the unhappy subject.

On the whole : the solicitude for the support of practical religion, every where manifested by the inspired writers, is utterly irreconcilable with those Antinomian inferences, which have been drawn from a few passages, either grossly perverted, or lamentably misunderstood. On the supposition of unconditional election, this pain-

^a James ii. 14.

ful anxiety for the maintenance of Christian virtue, is utterly unaccountable. For if works, wrought in the spirit of filial obedience, were really destitute, of all efficiency, towards the security of the interests of the next life, what occasion for so many directions, remonstrances, admonitions, and encouragements? And is it not obvious, that if our performances were regarded by them, as the necessary fruits of faith, and in no other light, that the principle itself might be fearlessly left to its own spontaneous developement?

But the truth is, and it is a truth which has not been sufficiently attended to, that the outflowings of Divine Grace, are not intended to bear us forward, as if by an overpowering current, to the ends of our being; though always sufficient, to help our infirmities; and, if we are not wanting to ourselves, to lead us into the way of salvation. Man is a moral being; and as such he is treated, in all the communications which have been made to him. Lights have been provided; but these must be sought after, and applied. Helps have been afforded; but he must avail himself of them. Strength is imparted; but this must be exerted. The gate of heaven has been opened to him; but he must press for admission into it.

That any exertions he can make, are utterly disproportionate to the ends to be attained, creates no objection to the necessity of those exertions. We may not expect to attain to a full and

satisfactory view, of the nature of their efficiency in the economy of grace. We, who know not the work for which man is intended hereafter, are ill qualified to judge of the suitableness of the discipline, by which he is here prepared for it: though on this subject, we are not left in total darkness. Natural reason would suggest, (and for its suggestions, it might claim the support of the Word of God,) that the exertions we make under the influence of Christian motives, and under the direction of Christian principles, are the efforts, whereby it was intended, that we should realize the supplies of grace: that they belong to that process, by which, the human soul assimilates that food which descends from above, the gracious outflowings of the Divine Spirit.

This view of the efficiency of human exertions, admits of illustrations, which shall be reserved for the next discourse. I am far from thinking that it reaches the entire extent of the subject. But we may well be satisfied, knowing that there is engaged in this concern, the power of Him, who is able to render his meanest instruments, efficient for his purposes.

NOTES.

[A.]

THE doctrine of exclusive privilege, in right of a fœderal head, being once adopted by a certain sect; every passage of Scripture, which has any relation to the atonement, is made to speak the same language. As an example, we may take the expression, which so frequently occurs in the writings of St. Paul: "The righteousness of faith;" or, "the righteousness which is by faith^a."

By the writers of the Calvinistic school, this is supposed to signify the righteousness of Christ, which believers are permitted to plead as their own, and which is imputed to them, by the Father, as such. But to come at the true meaning of these remarkable words, we should consider the subject of the Apostle's discourse, in the places where they occur. We find him there engaged, in exposing the presumption, of depending on our own unaided strength, to answer the demands of Divine justice. For the purpose of shewing the arrogance of such self-dependence, he had made a representation of the universal disobedience of mankind; wherein it appeared, that all had come short of the glory of God, Jew as well as Gentile. Had he proceeded to analyze the fairest actions of men; to drag to light, the impurity of desire; the selfishness; the

^a Rom. i. 17. iv. 11—13. ix. 30 and x. 6.

vanity; the lurking pride, which gives animation and vigour to all their performances, even those, which challenge the admiration and gratitude of the world; what an exhibition could he have made, of the folly, the arrogance, the impiety, of advancing any claims of merit on the Divine justice? But the mere statement of palpable and plain facts, universally observed and acknowledged, was sufficient for his purpose; which was to shew, that none of the sons of Adam, could hope, by his deservings, to be justified before God. The thing aimed at was impossible. Justification, is that judicial act of the sovereign Ruler of the world, whereby he pronounces the subject, to be not only innocent, but meritorious; not only just, but righteous and holy; the suitable object of his complacency. Who may challenge this decision of God himself, for his deservings? Or by what law shall he require to be judged? Every law is against him. That knowledge of the Divine will, imparted to man by the light of reason, is sufficient for the conviction of the Gentile: and that further Revelation made to the Jew, served only to discover, by its stronger light, the depths of his iniquity. Let him shroud himself in ignorance and in darkness if he can: it is his only plea: for by the law, that is, by the knowledge of the Divine will, he arrives at the knowledge of his own violations. "By the Law is the knowledge of sin^b." Not that our iniquities may be, in any sense, ascribed to the operation of that law. The law, we know, is spiritual and good: but it is by a comparison of our principles, affections, and dispositions, with that purity of heart and purpose, which the law requires; that we

^b Rom. iii. 20.

become sensible of our alienation from God, and the extent of our transgressions against him. This is the answer, which the Apostle, in another part of the same epistle, makes to the objection, "was then that which is good, made death unto me? God forbid. But sin that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin, by the commandment, might appear exceeding sinful^c." The Law serves for the detection of sin. "For I had not known sin but by the law: for I had not known lust," (that is the iniquity of lust,) "except the law had said, thou shalt not covet^d."

Such was the effect of the Law, whether discovered by the light of nature, or more perfectly revealed by the word of God. It tended to the manifestation of sin; but neither to its removal nor remission. Herein was the Law doubly defective; it brought no new supplies of strength, to enable those to whom it was given, to fulfil its injunctions; nor any provisions of mercy, for the forgiveness of their transgressions against it. Hence he infers the necessity of another mode of salvation, by which God would "put his laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts^e;" and whilst he thus enables them, to fulfil the law in the spirit of filial obedience; he might, at the same time, "be merciful to their unrighteousness^f." This glorious change, in our present condition and future prospects, is ascribed to the free grace of God, conveyed to us through the mediation of Christ; through that faith, whereby we are enabled to draw nigh unto God, in dependence on his unmerited goodness, and in unre-

^c Rom. vii. 13.

^e Heb. viii. 10.

^d Ibid. vii. 7.

^f Ibid. viii. 12.

served reliance, on the means of salvation, he hath gratuitously provided.

But is the law of God voided by this doctrine of salvation by faith? Let the Apostle answer this very question. "Do we make void the law, through faith? God forbid. Yea we establish the Law^a." For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the spirit, the things of the Spirit^b." It was thus the Patriarchs were strengthened, who lived in the anticipation of the promised blessings, by faith: and from the same well-spring of life, we, also, shall derive the supplies of all our spiritual wants, if with the same minds, we draw near to it. For Abraham was "the father of circumcision, to them who are not of the circumcision only, but also who walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had, being yet uncircumcised^c." The conclusion from hence, is, that the proud spirit of self-dependence must be extinguished, as being, in the highest degree, unsuitable to the condition, and adverse to the advancement of human nature: and that its room must be supplied, by that renovating principle of Christian faith, whereby we draw nigh unto God; communicate with his Holy Spirit; and receiving of his fulness, are enabled to yield him, acceptable, though still imperfect, obedience.

This being one of the most spiritualizing doctrines

^a Rom. iii. 31.

^b Ibid. viii. 3, 4, 5.

^c Ibid. iv. 12.

of Christianity, and that, in the establishment of which, the Apostle is mainly occupied in his epistle to the Romans ; I deemed it right to give it more at length, than might perhaps seem requisite for the decision of the question before us. But its application to that question is immediate. For faith, being the soul-renewing principle, which he opposes to the self-sufficiency, of those who depend on their own strength, for the fulfilment of the law of God ; and on their works, for the meritorious claim to the promises, set forth in the Gospel ; it would seem almost impossible that we should understand by the expressions “ the righteousness of faith,” and “ the righteousness which is by faith,” The righteousness of Christ, which no way depends on our faith : or any thing, but the personal righteousness of the believer ; which, however imperfect, is accepted, as it springs from faith, the principle of all filial obedience. If this interpretation could require any further support, such is abundantly supplied, in the 11th chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, which is wholly a recital of the works of faith, and the proofs of its acceptableness in the sight of God.

[B.]

It has been maintained indeed by Michaelis, that the doctrine combated by St. James, has no reference to that of St. Paul : and this opinion he endeavours to support by two arguments. First, by proving, that the epistle of St. James, was written before that of St. Paul to the Romans. But his proofs of this position are, by his own confession, inconclusive ; and the opinion itself, is contrary to that which is generally entertained on the subject.

His next argument, is drawn from a comparison of the seemingly conflicting passages : and he thinks he has found, that it is not a corruption of St. Paul's doctrine, which is corrected by St. James ; but one peculiar to certain of the Jews. What sect of Jews they were, he has not told us ; and it might be difficult to discover. We know that the prevailing error of the Jews, lay altogether on the opposite side : that it consisted not in attributing efficacy to faith without works, but in laying too great stress on their ritual observances, to the neglect of the spirit of the commandment. But for his proof, that it was not a misrepresentation of St. Paul's doctrine, against which St. James argues ; he tells us, that the faith, whose efficacy St. James denies, unless accompanied by works, is not the Christian faith ; but merely the belief in one God : and this opinion, he grounds on the language of the Apostle's address : " thou believest that there is one God ; thou doest well : the devils also believe and tremble." But this, if it could prove that they were not Christians, would also prove, equally, that they were not Jews : since the belief of Jews, as well as of Christians, extended to many other particulars.

But why was this particular doctrine specified ? The reason is obvious. The writer is exposing the inefficiency of faith without works ; and when this is to be shewn by exemplification, no tenet could be more properly adduced, than this fundamental article of all true religion. When he intimates, that men may believe even this, and yet be devils ; the same may be safely inferred, with respect to every truth of natural or revealed religion.

The supposition of Michaelis, that the expostulation

was addressed, to persons who believed merely in the existence of the one God, and not in any of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, is not only destitute of foundation, but palpably false. For it is evident, that the writer of the epistle, did not contemplate any defect in the creed of those whom he addressed, as to the objects it embraced : much more, so great a defect as is implied in this supposition. It is not for a moment to be imagined, that any Christian writer, addressing persons such as here supposed ; and this, on the subject of their faith, could have passed unnoticed, such lamentable ignorance or disbelief of the great truths of the Gospel : that without applying himself to teach them the way of God more perfectly ; he should content himself, with inculcating the necessity of moral practice, suitable to their religious opinions, whatever these might be.

The subject of the expostulation plainly points out, that which, in the view of the writer, was their chief defect. This did not consist in their ignorance or disbelief of the great objects of the Christian's faith, or of the foundations of the Christian's hopes : but in the want of suitable practice, attributed by the writer, to their misconceptions, relative to the sufficiency of a mere speculative assent to the doctrines of Christianity.

But it is needless to argue, that the persons addressed must have been Christians, since this is so plainly marked in the epistle itself^k ; nay in the general exhortation to which the above cited passage belongs ; which begins by requiring of them, so to order their words and actions, " as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty^l." This is an expression, in common use

^k James ii. 1. 7. 12.

^l Ibid. ii. 12.

among the writers of the New Testament: and always applied by them, to the law of the Gospel; to mark its character, as distinguished from the Levitical Law of Moses, which consisted of ordinances positive and burthensome. This address is plainly directed to persons, who being emancipated from the Law of Moses, and having taken refuge in the Gospel, felt its yoke so easy, and its burthen so light, that they conceived themselves to be released from all moral obligation. However perverted their notions, they were yet professors of the Christian Religion: and this is a title, which could not have been assumed by themselves, or admitted by the Apostle, on the ground of a simple belief in the supremacy of the one God: a belief common to them, not only with the Jews, but with most of the enlightened heathens. No sect of Christians had ever limited their views, to this one doctrine of natural theology: even the modern Unitarians believe much more.

Neither is Michaelis more successful in attempting to establish a distinction between the meanings of the word Justification, as it is used by St. Paul and St. James. He supposes, that by the former, nothing more is meant than absolution from past sins; but that the term, as used by the latter, denotes that a person is morally good, virtuous, and holy. Hence he argues, as before, that it was not the intention of St. James to prevent the doctrine of St. Paul from being misunderstood; that the doctrine which he does combat, is not a corruption of that of St. Paul, but one totally different: for that as the faith, whose efficiency he denies, is not the faith of the Gospel, but the faith in the one God: so, the justification, which he refuses to attribute to this faith, is not the negative justification, which only

amounts to a remission of sins, but the retribution which is the reward of positive virtue.

In reply to the latter part of his statement, respecting the meaning of justification, we assert that there never has been any difference amongst Christians, as to the notion conveyed by this term: that it has been invariably used to denote, that judicial act of the sovereign Judge, whereby men are declared to be restored to his favour, with all the benefits annexed to that condition. Indeed with respect to the grounds on which it may be claimed or expected, there has been, and perhaps ever will be, much diversity of opinion. Some have pleaded their own merits, others those of Christ: and of these last, who alone deserve the name of Christians, some have supposed that their interest in the Redeemer, is conclusively established, by the nature of the compact into which he entered with the Father; and that the same is assured to all, who recognize him in his person and offices. Others are persuaded, that the benefits of his intercession, are available, only to those who follow him, in the way in which he has preceded, and by the lights he has imparted.

But the mischief of Michaelis's attempt, is not merely, that it would mislead us, as to the mutual bearing of certain passages of Scripture; and prevent us, from availing ourselves of the safeguard, which such a comparison would afford us. It involves a gross misrepresentation of the leading doctrines of Christianity, as taught by two of its apostles. It makes St. Paul assert, that the mere belief in the death and sacrifice of Christ, though not followed by holiness of life and conversation, is effectual for the forgiveness of past transgressions. From which, it may be inferred, that it must be effectual for the security of every professor

of Christianity, whatever course he may follow. But St. Paul has never asserted, that an inoperative faith is good for any thing, not even for the remission of the penalties due to past transgressions. On the contrary, he reminds us that, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth, in unrighteousness ^a:" and it is agreeable to the sense of mankind, as well as to the repeated declarations of God in his word, to suppose, that our responsibility is commensurate to the extent of the advantages we possess: that superior lights of religious knowledge, if not followed, serve only to widen the distance between our convictions and our practice; and thereby to augment the load of our guilt, and consequent misery.

St. James, by his supposed acquiescence in the sufficiency of a belief in the one God, is represented as giving countenance to that latitudinarian opinion, that a belief in this single article; a belief common to Jew, Turk, and Deist, shall avail, not only for the forgiveness of past offences, but for the fullest restoration to the Divine favour: provided that the conduct of such a believer, harmonizes with his profession.

It would seem then, that Christianity is strangely supported by the two Apostles, as they are here represented. St. Paul dispensing with works and St. James with the Christian faith. And is it at this expence of all the great truths of Christianity, doctrinal and practical; the opinion, that St. James does not refer to the writings of St. Paul, is to be established? Surely a perversion of Scripture, so gross and absurd, requires no further comment.

^a Rom. i. 18.

The opinion that the epistle to the Romans was the first written, and that such a reference was intended by St. James, is supported by internal evidence, as strong, as can be supposed, in a case where one author is not expressly named by another. We have already adverted to two discussions among the early Christians, on the subject of justification, and the terms on which it might be either claimed or expected. The object, in the first of these, was to ascertain the person, whose merits should be pleaded: whether men should rely on their own personal merits, or on those of the Redeemer. The opinion in favor of personal merit, was congenial to the natural sentiments of mankind, unenlightened by Revelation; and was further confirmed, in the minds of the Jews, by the importance which they attributed to their legal observances. Now, though some leaven of this error, will ever remain in the minds of half-enlightened Christians, yet the discussion itself, naturally belongs to that period, when the leading doctrine of the Christian religion, which refers us for the hope of salvation to the merits of Christ alone, was not well understood, by those who acknowledged the Divine original of Christianity itself. But this is the controversy in which St. Paul was concerned.

The other discussion, related to men's interests in the merits of Christ: some being disposed to rely on mere belief, or a simple recognition; others, contending for the necessity of a soul-enlivening principle of faith, which should shew itself in the fruits of a holy life and conversation. Now this controversy evidently implies, that the former had been already decided: that the Jewish pretensions to personal merit, had been put down; and the doctrine of salvation, by the merits of

the Redeemer, already established. And it necessarily belongs to that period, when the true doctrine, having so far made its way, was perverted, by some who imagined that their interest in the merits of Christ, was assured to them by mere belief, without any attempt to follow him as the Captain of their salvation, or to engage in any warfare against their spiritual adversaries : their own carnal affections. This discussion, therefore, is evidently of later origin : and it is that, in which we find St. James engaged.

When it is moreover considered, that the errors combated by St. James, are the same which are, even now, principally supported by perverted interpretations of the writings of St. Paul ; the supposition that he may have alluded to these writings, must be admitted to be at least not unreasonable : nay we are naturally directed to look for such an allusion : and when we find him, in his argument, going over the same ground, already trodden by St. Paul : referring to the same example of Abraham ; and to the same passage of the Old Testament, recording the testimony of God to his faith ; and finally, drawing from the same premises, an inference, restrictive of that which certain interpreters are known to have ascribed to this latter Apostle ; we must require much stronger evidence, than any as yet adduced, to persuade us, that the Catholic epistle of St. James, was written before that of St. Paul to the Romans : or that it contains no allusion to this latter production.

If the reader is not convinced, by what has been here suggested, that one of these Apostles had pointed to a passage in the writings of the other ; let him remember that this is altogether an argument, *ex abundantia*.

The doctrine of the efficiency of faith, without works,

is evidently that which is condemned by St. James; and this is sufficient for our main purpose. Moreover, whether the obnoxious error, did originate in the misinterpretation of the writings of St. Paul or not, it is notorious that it is chiefly defended out of those writings: and this should suggest the propriety of self-distrust, in applying to them for the solution of embarrassing questions.

But if this should be deemed an insufficient ground of apprehension, as to the danger of an incautious use of these writings; the defect is abundantly supplied by St. Peter; who, though not so particular as St. James, in commenting on the above-mentioned error; is much more explicit, in adverting to the source of such corruptions of Christian doctrine. The passage, which well deserves our most earnest attention, is here given at length. "And account the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation: even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things: in which are some things hard to be understood; which they that are unlearned and unstable, wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction."

The Apostle had been treating of the counsels of God, respecting the final condition of mankind, and the courses by which they were to be conducted thither. And lest the delay of that consummation, which was to crown their hopes with the promised blessings, should create impatience; he tells them the uses which were to be served by it; that "the long-suffering of God worketh salvation. That this consolatory doctrine

" 2 Peter iii. 15, 16.

was already intulcoated by St. Paul, who had in all his epistles treated of such things, that is, of the counsels of God : that in these mysterious subjects, there are many things which elude the grasp of our finite apprehensions : that his representations of these matters, were perverted by men, who from the want of the necessary erudition, are unqualified for the consideration of such topics, and the task of interpreting such places ; or who through natural levity of mind, are easily unsettled in their religious opinions. And lest his readers should follow the example of these men, in looking for some peculiar views or revelations, in the writings of that Apostle ; and by giving way to a spirit of curiosity, run into speculations unessential to Christianity, or adverse to its practical influence ; he reminds them, that they were already sufficiently instructed on these subjects, “ Ye, therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.”

One would think that in all this, the Apostle had been speaking of modern sectaries, and I do not know from what adversary, they can expect to meet with a more pointed attack. Here they may behold, as in a mirror, their character and their course. The subjects to which their opinions are referable ; the source of their errors : their contempt for the preparatives of erudition : their presumptuous temerity : their vacillation : their distortions of the Scriptures, in accommodation to the system they have embraced. Would that the concluding part of the picture, did not equally apply to them. May God defend them from themselves, and from the destruction, which the Apostle declares to be the end of such proceedings.

Whilst commenting on this remarkable passage of Scripture, it might not be altogether proper to pass unnoticed, the correction of the translation, proposed by Whitby and others; more especially, as in the passage so corrected, some may think, that the difficulties, and consequent erroneous conceptions, are attributed to the subjects themselves, and not to the writings, in which they are treated of. In the original, “Ὡς καὶ ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐπιστολαῖς, λαλῶν ἐν αὐταῖς περὶ τούτων, ἐν οἷς, ἐστί δυσνόητά τινα ἃ οἱ ἀμαθεῖς καὶ ἀσκητικοὶ σκεβ-
λοῦσιν, ὥς καὶ τὰς λοιπὰς γραφάς.” The relative pronoun *ὧς*, it is said, does not refer to *ἐπιστολαῖς*, a word of a different gender; but to *τούτων*: and from hence it is concluded, that the caution given by the writer, relates to the matters discussed by St. Paul, as containing things above ordinary comprehension. But to me it seems, that in this emendation, grammar is consulted more than common sense. The remark of St. Peter is extended by him, to the other Scriptures; and is it to be supposed, that those are excepted, by which that remark had been principally suggested? Nay, does he not class the difficult things, of whose perversion he complains, with those other Scriptures? Are they not therefore themselves Scriptures? And what can be the force of the word “other,” “*λοιπὰς*,” if he had not meant that the portion of Scripture written by St. Paul, had been so abused? And how is grammatical accuracy consulted, by making St. Peter say, “which subjects, as well as other Scriptures?”

Those who are fond of grammatical accuracy, may satisfy themselves with the passage as it stands; by referring the relative pronoun, to a noun understood, such as *γραμμασι*: or still better, by following the ma-

nuscripts of highest authority, such as the Vatican and Alexandrine, in reading $\acute{\alpha}\iota\varsigma$ for $\delta\iota\varsigma$: which is also agreeable to the Syriac and Arabic versions.

But with respect to the use of the passage in this note, it is of very little importance which reading we adopt ; or whether the emendation of the English translation, proposed by Whitby, be received or not. The difficulties belong to the matter or manner of St. Paul ; or to both. St. Peter speaks of fatal misapprehensions or perversions ; suppose of subjects ; he tells us, that these subjects are, principally, treated of in the writings of St. Paul. And is not this sufficient, to include those writings in the caution he has left us ; and to intimate the necessity for the exercise of sound discretion, in the use we make of them ?

DISCOURSE XII.

ON GOOD WORKS CONSIDERED AS MEANS OF GRACE.

JAMES i. 25.

Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

IN the foregoing discourse, we endeavoured to vindicate our holy religion, from the perversions of those, who have misrepresented its doctrines, for the purpose of liberating themselves from its precepts. It now remains that we should conclude what was there begun ; by a few remarks on those systems, which without going the entire length, of excluding human efforts from the religion of the Gospel, have, nevertheless, a manifest tendency, to weaken the sense of their importance and of our responsibility. What was last addressed to you, related to the Antinomian views of Scripture ; it is now proposed to consider those of Calvinism, relative to the place of works in the Christian dispensation.

But not to widen a breach, already much too great among Christians ; it may be well to begin

by stating the mutual admissions, of interpreters of the Calvinistic school, and those of the established Church of England, on this subject.

Beginning with the great God ; it is on both sides admitted, that his power is unlimited, his wisdom all-seeing, his goodness all perfect : That this goodness, being uncalled for by any claim of merit ; is, to all its objects, free grace : to the apostate race of Adam, pardoning mercy. And that this grace of God, may be extended to the chief of sinners ; bringing them into the way of salvation, which is by faith in Christ Jesus. It is moreover admitted, that the works of man himself, must, necessarily, partake of the nature of those principles and affections, by which he is actuated : and accordingly, before that he is called to the knowledge of God, by faith in the Gospel, his doings must necessarily be deficient in that spirit, which constitutes their value in the sight of God. That therefore holiness, cannot go before faith, being the fruit, and, consequently, the visible sign of this vital principle.

After a coincidence so extensive, it might be supposed, that there could be but little room for controversy. Undoubtedly, an agreement in matters so important, should very much mitigate the asperity of any discussion, by which the remaining differences should be adjusted.

With respect to the necessity of works of righteousness, and the principles from which they fol-

low ; we contemplate not a shadow of difference, between the divines of the Establishment, and those of the Calvinistic school. But as to the light, in which they should be regarded, there is, indeed, much difference of opinion. For whilst the former disclaim, with as much abhorrence as the latter, the presumptuous pretension to any claim on the Divine justice ; regarding their best performances, as infinitely unworthy of the holiness and majesty of that great Being, to whose favor they are encouraged to aspire ; they yet conceive, that they cannot avoid regarding the performances he has required, as the condition of their acceptance ; and the course he has prescribed, as the way by which they are conducted to the high prize of their calling.

From this, the Calvinist dissents ; conceiving it to be unsuitable to the freedom of God's grace, to suppose that his decrees should be fettered, by any conditions ; to his foreknowledge, that they should be subject to any contingencies ; to his all-pervading power, to require the benefit of any co-operation ; much more, that of such a creature as man. Even those among them, who admit that the grace of God is communicated by means and instruments ; and that human efforts may be among the means employed by him, for the accomplishment of his purposes ; still contend, that every thing of this kind is included in the decrees of the Almighty. That his irreversible appoint-

ments, extend to means as well as ends ; embracing, not only all the particulars of our present course ; but the affections and principles, by which we are propelled or directed.

Whence arises this difference, among those whose faith embraces the same objects ? This question, I think, may be briefly answered. It is natural, and perhaps necessary for men, in their reasonings within themselves, as well as with each other, to commence with that point in a series, which they regard as best established ; and to their views on this part of the subject, to accommodate all the rest.

In the order of things relating to man's final salvation, some begin with the highest end of the chain : the incontrollable power ; the absolute foreknowledge ; the unlimited sovereignty ; and free grace of God. And being well aware, that their notions on these subjects, cannot be too highly exalted, they are led to entertain such views of them, as to leave no room for contingency or condition. The unlimited power of the great God nothing can evade : his all-seeing wisdom, nothing can elude : his free grace, is fettered by no claim. All therefore is fixed ; irrespectively and unconditionally fixed, in the Divine determinations. The communications of light and strength, which God is pleased to make to any of his creatures, whom he may have destined to salvation, are therefore sufficient for the attainment of this end,

independently of the efforts of the individual himself : or if only through the intervention of such efforts, then are these also included in his immutable decrees. They are the consequences of his determinations, and not the conditions on which they are grounded.

Whilst our views embrace the same objects ; the train of thinking, by which we endeavour to connect them, is altogether the opposite to this. Holding to the notions of free agency and consequent responsibility, which God hath so deeply implanted, we admit all that can be said, respecting the greatness and extent of the Divine attributes : but not the consequences, which would militate against our plainest convictions. And if we cannot remove every difficulty from the subject ; by reconciling these persuasions, to what we believe of the Divine perfections ; we conceive it to be, because the faculties of our nature are inadequate to the complete apprehension of these perfections : that our views on this part of the subject, are not only inadequate, but that what they do extend to, is reached, by the help of analogy.

This is the true statement of the case. We ascend above our own sphere, but a little way ; and that little, by attributing to the great Being, whose nature we would conceive, sentiments, and feelings, and powers, analogous to those we experience within ourselves. The manifestations which God hath made of himself, whether by natural rea-

son, by the word of Revelation, or the exhibition of his incarnate Son, are all of this kind. They are all afforded, in accommodation to our faculties of perception : and though sufficient to present to us, an object for our devotion and imitation ; they seem not to have been intended, to support a chain of reasoning, whereby we might demonstratively make out his purposes, or the means by which they are to be accomplished by him *. These are to be known, by what he has submitted to our observation, and what he has further declared in his written word, relative to his moral government. Accordingly, whilst we subscribe to all that has been, or can be stated, respecting the freedom of God's grace, the infinitude of his power and wisdom ; we conceive, we may be allowed to question the truth of those inferences, which would weaken the motives to obedience, or shake the foundations of moral obligation.

In discussing the opinions of our adversaries, we take not with them, a line of reasoning *a priori*, to which, as we conceive, the human faculties are not competent : but we compare their inferences, with the practical principles, which, by the admissions, of both sides, should be preserved inviolate.

Reasoning thus, which is the only way of reasoning on the subject ; we contend, that the doctrine which consigns each individual to final hap-

* See Discourse on Predestination.

pinness or misery, in consequence of an irrespective decree; is so far, a doctrine of necessity, which leaves no room for that of retribution. The notion that this condition is determined, by the appointment of a superior being, and not by the inherent nature of things themselves, makes no difference, to him who is the subject of these determinations. According to this doctrine, God, indeed, is not controuled, by an unchangeable course of events: but the state of man is the same; his future condition is fixed immutably and irrespectively; and having no power in this concern, he cannot regard it as a state of retribution.

Neither is the objection removed, by supposing that the condition so appointed to each individual, is connected with his present course. Nay in one respect, this supposition increases the mischief; by extending the notion of necessity, from the final issue, to his proceedings, connected with it. For by the connexion, of whatever kind it is imagined, his present course is subjected to the same decree, which fixes his ultimate destination. And as the doctrine of unconditional happiness or misery, leaves no room for that of retribution, so the persuasion that the proceedings, which lead to that issue, are altogether determined by a power external to man himself, is no less efficacious in releasing him from the sense of responsibility.

Neither is the strength of the motives to obe-

dience, left unimpaired by this doctrine. By the Antinomian representations, they are swept away altogether. By those of the Calvinist, they are offered to our view, in a manner, which tends at least, to weaken their influence.

Indeed, the doctrine of unconditional decrees, however modified, has a manifest tendency to produce such an effect. Under the influence of this belief, the communications of light and strength, which God is pleased to make to us, are naturally supposed to be sufficient for the accomplishment of his purposes : and the importance of the efforts, we are required to make, in the use of the means of grace, as naturally, sinks in our estimation.

This remark, though general, is applicable, with different degrees of force, to the several orders of Calvinism ; suitably to the importance annexed by each, to human efforts in the process of salvation.

By some it is conceived, that obedience to the Divine commands, is the unfailing, as it is the natural consequence, of the gift of the Spirit, by which, the chosen of God are inwardly animated ; and therefore the indication of his favorable determinations respecting them. This is the place assigned to human efforts, by him who approaches nearest to the Antinomian, in the scale of Calvinism. And it is asserted, that this view of man's obedience, is as influential in directing him into that course, as the persuasion of its conducive-

ness to the ends of his calling : that men are as forcibly moved to a certain action, or a certain course, by the belief that it is the indication of a desirable result ; as they could be, by the notion of its conduciveness to that result. That the certainty, not the mode of the connexion, is that in which they are concerned : and that this certainty is established, in one way, as well as in the other.

In observing on this theory, we admit that it does attribute some importance to a course of obedience. The issue, is nothing less than our eternal well-doing ; and the indications of such an issue, cannot be regarded with indifference. The doctrine of simple indications, therefore, leaves some room for the influence of motives. Those which it does suggest, are addressed to our curiosity, respecting that destination, over which we have no controul.

The comparative efficacy of such motives, may be doubted. But this question needs not here to be discussed. Indeed it must be decided by the experimental convictions of mankind : and it will, probably, be differently decided ; according to the power of the principle of curiosity, as it may be found in different individuals.

It is enough to observe, that whatever force may be ascribed to such motives, it is all retained, by those who regard their actions, as conducive to the desired result. The course which is conducive, is, surely, indicative also. Therefore the

question, fairly proposed, relates not to a comparison between these different views : but it is, whether the motive to a certain course of actions, is equally strong, should we regard them as simple indications ; or as means and conditions, and, therefore, as indications also? What then is gained by this theory ? Nay, is not much lost to the influence of motives, and this without any thing, in the way of compensation for that loss? Surely, the influence of the motives to obedience, is not found to be, in fact, so strong, that we can permit it to be weakened, without apprehension for the consequences. Surely, it is not unreasonable, to fear, that if any of the supports of virtue are withdrawn, which, collectively, are found to be so rarely sufficient for its security ; that if we are not permitted, to regard the performance of our duties, either as the discipline by which we are strengthened, or the condition, on which depends our acceptance with God ; our persuasions would be found, still more frequently, unavailing : still more rarely sufficient, to ensure the necessary circumspection in our Christian warfare, against the world, the flesh, and the Devil ; to check the natural tendency to self-abandonment ; or stimulate the indolence, which shrinks from the irksomeness of self-restraint, and from the labour of prosecuting any spiritual advantage.

But there are various gradations of error. The more moderate Calvinist does not think that it

derogates from the power of God, to suppose, that he proceeds to the accomplishment of his designs, by the use of means and instruments. Nay, he will admit, that the actions of man himself, may have a place among those means, by which he is conducted to that end, which God, in his wisdom, hath allotted to him. But then he contends, that the decrees of the Almighty, relative to the final condition of each individual, necessarily extend to the means, by which it is to be attained ; embracing not only all his actual proceedings, but the affections, dispositions, and principles, by which he is attracted or impelled, restrained or directed.

This is, in one respect, an approach to the truth ; and so far, the concession is of value. It admits all that we contend for, relative to the importance of our present course ; but the strength which it allows to the motives to obedience, it takes from the sense of responsibility. Man may be ultimately miserable, but if the dispositions which bring him to this state, be those which God himself has implanted, how is he accountable ? Nay, does not this system lead to yet greater impiety, than that which approaches nearer to unqualified Antinomianism ? The latter would make God the author of human misery. Would not the former, make him, also, the author of sin ? The Calvinist rejects the inference with horror. Let him do so consistently, by abandoning the

line of argument which leads to these consequences.

It is a mode of argument, which we may not apply to the present subject. We have not those complete views, of the nature and essence of the great First Cause, which might enable us, to reason from thence, synthetically, to what should be the constitution, of the natural, or the spiritual world. Nor can we expect, that an attempt so absurd and presumptuous, should end in any thing but embarrassment, and self-confutation. The modest Christian will leave this course to the atheist, who, being deterred by no consequences, may therefore follow it consistently. This, the Calvinist cannot do. When he has brought out the conclusions, which he wishes to maintain ; he must shut his eyes to others, which seem to follow by an inference as immediate. Having reasoned downward from the foreknowledge, the unrestrained power and unlimited sovereignty of God ; to unsettle our plainest convictions, respecting the efficiency of human actions, and the freedom of choice by which they are directed ; he nevertheless, will not admit, that the motives to obedience may be weakened, or man released from his responsibility.

There is indeed a mode of reasoning on our religious concerns, which is consistent with sobriety of judgment. It is that, which beginning with what we know, and feel, and see around us,

of the dispensations of Providence ; ascends, by analogy, to a course more extensive, and results more important, than those which are here submitted to our observation.

This is very different, from an attempt to penetrate into the mysterious nature of the great First Cause ; and to seek in what is truly incomprehensible, for arguments to falsify our plainest convictions, and overturn the best established lessons of experience. It is almost needless to observe, that the word of God, affords no encouragement, for the employment of reason in this latter way ; whilst by numerous appeals, it acknowledges the sufficiency of our faculties, for that other less ambitious task, of comparing the declarations of Scripture, with the particulars of the Divine administration, which are matters of experience. “ Ye hypocrites,” (saith our Lord,) “ ye can discern the face of the sky, and of the earth, but how is it that ye cannot discern this time ? Yea : and why, even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right ? ”

The task to which we are here invited ; that of comparing the discoveries of Revelation respecting the dealings of the Almighty, with those observations on the course of his Providence, with which we are familiar ; is not only suited to our faculties, but attended with the most important advantages. In this use of reason, we shall not

¹ Luke xii. 56.

fail to improve our conceptions, of the great discoveries, which are made to us in the word of Revelation ; and to open a new and inexhaustible source of evidence, in support of the truths it inculcates. All leading us to acknowledge that the Gospel, is but the second volume of that work, which is written on the face of nature : and that the plan of Providence, revealed to us in Scripture, relative to the government and discipline of man, is not, as might be supposed by a superficial observer, separated, by an impassible chasm, from that which is open to our view in the course of the present life ; but on the contrary, that the several parts of the Divine economy, are impressed with the same character, animated by the same pervading spirit, and directed by the same all-disposing wisdom.

In this way then, let us reason, respecting the consistency, of the notion of conduciveness, which we annex to the proceedings of man himself ; and those which we are required to entertain, concerning the freedom of God's grace, and the unlimited extent of his power and wisdom. We have only to consider the manner in which, the provisions for the maintenance of our temporal condition, are afforded, in order to view in their proper light, those by which our spiritual well-being is to be advanced or supported. But how do we reason about the former ? We regard the supreme God, as the bestower of our natural life,

and of all the provisions by which it is sustained ; and if we are called upon, to apply those gifts of his providence, to such purposes of grace, do we esteem him less the author and support of our existence ? It is acknowledged, that the produce of the earth is the work, and the gift, of God alone : and that man, by his utmost ingenuity, is unable to create a single grain of the food by which he is sustained. The principle of vegetation, by which the seed converts the elements of the earth into its own substance ; as also those powers of animal life, by which the food itself is transformed into the substance of our bodies ; are the effects of power and wisdom, so far beyond the reach of man, that we justly shrink from the impious arrogance, of claiming any share in the work of upholding our own being ; the most transient consideration, sufficing to convince us, that we might as reasonably claim the merit of self-creation, as the power of self-preservation. Accordingly we find, that the best regulated minds, have ever referred the continuance of existence, from day to day, and from hour to hour ; to a continued and uninterrupted exertion of the same creative energy, by which they were at first called into being. Notwithstanding all this, it is certain, that the same God condescends, to make us the humble instruments by which his power is exerted : that he calls upon us, to attend him in these inscrutable operations ; by the cultivation of the earth,

and the application of its fruits to the relief of our natural wants : and the consequences we should anticipate, from our failure in any part of this our ministerial office ; whether by neglecting to give the required attention to the cultivation of the soil ; to the preservation of its produce ; or the seasonable application of it to our wants ; leaves no room to deny, that the concurrence of human industry, is, by Divine appointment, rendered, somehow or other, necessary ; whether it be regarded as the operative means, or the indispensable condition. The general course of Divine Providence is, throughout, agreeable to this ; the second causes as they are termed, are such, as cannot, for a moment, arrest the progress of the mind, which would soar to the contemplation of its Creator : the various blessings we enjoy, being such, as we can, with no greater propriety, ascribe to the mere efficacy of the means, we apply, than the water of the rock, to the touch of Moses's rod ; or the healing of Naaman's leprosy, to the ablution prescribed by the Prophet. Yet these operations of human industry, are the channels, through which, it hath seemed good to the wisdom of God, to convey these blessings, to his creatures : and we must apply to his bounty, in the way he hath, himself, appointed.

By attending, therefore, to the course, observed by Divine Providence, in the supply of our animal wants ; we cannot be at a loss, for illustra-

tions, by which to satisfy ourselves, that human exertions may be requisite, for the attainment of those spiritual blessings ; of which, nevertheless, when we look for the efficient cause, we cannot, any where, find even a momentary resting place, until we ascend to the supreme source of all power and goodness. Illustrations, which no longer suffer us to question the consistency of human works and Divine grace, in the scheme of redemption ; which leave us no room to deny, that religious discipline may be operative, whilst God is all-powerful : that it may be necessary, whilst he is all-gracious : in fine ; that the strictest attention to our moral and religious duties, may be instrumental, and even indispensably requisite, to the attainment of an object, which is, nevertheless, to be regarded as the free and unmerited gift of God alone.

Accordingly we find, that these essential truths, so far from being opposed to one another in Scripture, are frequently inculcated in the very same lesson ; nay, that the all-sufficiency of Divine grace, so far from being admitted as an excuse for relaxation, is distinctly proposed as a stimulant to exertion. “ Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” is the admonition of the Apostle to his Christian Brethren : and as the ground of this admonition, he subjoins, “ for it is God who worketh in you to will and to do of his

good pleasure^b.” I am aware, my friends, that the latter part of this passage, has often been urged in support of the Antinomian scheme: the words “for it is God who worketh in you to will, and to do, of his good pleasure,” intimating, that no good act or thought can originate within ourselves; have been frequently cited, by those who declaim against the presumption of supposing, that we can do any thing to advance the work of our salvation. Yet it is plain, that, in the mind of the Apostle, the insufficiency of man, which is intimated in this latter member of the passage; is not only consistent, but connected, with the operation of human works, implied in the former member of the same sentence. Nay, that our absolute dependence on Divine grace, is mentioned, not merely, as being consistent with our exertions, but as an incentive to the earnestness of these exertions: that as good dispositions do not originate with ourselves; we should cherish them with a solicitude, proportionate to the extent of our spiritual wants, and to the danger of our condition: and that as they are the richest gifts of the great God, we should treasure them with a holy dread, suitable to those sentiments of religious awe, with which it becomes us ever to regard him.

The words of the Apostle, are therefore, to this effect: “the principles and dispositions, with-

^b Phil. ii. 12, 13.

out which, you shall not be admitted to the enjoyment of eternal life, are not the natural inmates of the human heart : they are the outflowings of the Divine Spirit, by which you are to be renewed in the image of your Creator : beware how you resist, how you grieve, how you extinguish the Spirit of God. It is He, also, who hath given you to do. It is the Providence of the same God, which hath furnished the means, whereby these sentiments and principles may be matured and established : slight not the provisions of his mercy ; but embrace them with an avidity, arising from a due apprehension of your natural poverty and imbecility ; and use them, with diligence, suited to your dread of that Being, who hath assigned your task ; and who will, assuredly, require an account of the talent, which he hath delivered for your management."

We have compared our spiritual and temporal concerns, in what relates to the co-operation of human endeavours with the Divine bounty : in order to shew, that the notions which are admitted to be consistent in the one case, cannot be deemed inconsistent in the other. In the latter case the consistency is more readily acknowledged : and wherefore ? It is because the result is before our observation, as well as the course, by which we proceed to it. And thus whilst the efficiency of those proceedings, depends on arrangements,

which can be referred to the power and wisdom of God alone ; experience, which inculcates the necessity for those proceedings, attaches to them the notion of an indispensable condition.

In our spiritual concerns, the results of our endeavours, are too extensive, and too distant, to be thus brought within the scope of our immediate observation, and therefore the connexion may not be so readily acknowledged. It is, however, observable in part ; and where it is observable, the nature of the connexion is more apparent. We acknowledge that the affections and principles, by which we are animated and guided, have an evident relation to our future and more durable interests. It is also matter of observation, that the moral principles are weak and ill-established until they are reduced to practice ; and that it is only by a course of moral conduct, that they are confirmed and invigorated. Thus we may acknowledge, the reciprocal influence of practice, in confirming and strengthening the inward principles by which it is directed ; the effect of resistance and self-denial, in weakening the force of adverse inclinations ; in removing the difficulty from counter-attractions ; and in obtaining for the sentiments and principles which we have been accustomed to favor, the exclusive possession of the heart. The change thus produced in our spiritual nature, by a course of obedience, is evidently reduceable to the force of habit, with which we are already

so familiar. **Man himself is a creature of habit : his thoughts, his affections, his principles, his movements, his faculties, his entire nature is the result of habitual exertion or passion.** He gains an ascendancy over himself, by habitual self-denial : he renders himself the slave of his meaner propensities, by passive compliance with their solicitations. We have already seen how the power of Christian faith, is enlivened and strengthened, by its own active exertions *. It is the same with all the other Christian affections and principles. If not actively exerted, they have no dominion over us, nor fixed establishment within us : but if we do, what God hath enabled us, for the cultivation of the good seed he hath sown in our hearts ; the vital principle will not long remain dormant. It will speedily root itself within us ; our faculties shall all contribute to its growth ; and the entire of our moral nature being assimilated to that of the principle implanted, we shall have our “ fruit unto holiness, and the end, everlasting life .”

But among those who admit, that we are fully warranted by the Word of God, in ascribing importance to the course pursued by us ; some may desire to be satisfied, that we have the same warrant, for the account we have given, of the connexion between human actions and the dispositions and principles, to which they are referable,

* See Discourse I. II.

† Rom. vi. 22.

in what relates to their mutual influence. And though we deem, that common sense is a sufficient warrant, for the statements we have made in this matter, yet the enquiry is not to be discouraged ; and the Apostle shall answer it. “ Know you not,” (saith he,) “ vain man that faith without works is dead being alone^d?” and that “ by works is faith made perfect^e ;” and who can follow him, in the illustration of this doctrine, without admiring the philosophical truth, which he presents to us in the simple garb of Scripture language ; where characterizing the faith, which is not followed by conduct suitable to that profession, he compares it to the transient and unsubstantial image, which a man beholds in a mirror ; declaring, at the same time, that the doer of the work, shall not be a forgetful hearer ; but, that by submitting to the discipline, prescribed by the Gospel, for suffering its principles to descend into his heart, and incorporate with his nature ; “ this man shall be blessed in his deed^f.”

But why make selections, when the language of Scripture, in its numberless precepts and exhortations, affords the most ample confirmation of the notion of efficiency or conduciveness, which we have attached to human exertions ? It directs us, to act after a certain manner, for the attainment of a certain end ; and not in a manner consequential on the decrees of the Almighty, already

^d James ii. 20.

^e Ibid. ii. 22.

^f Ibid. i. 25.

passed in our favour. To labour for the high prize of our calling, not in order that we may satisfy ourselves that it is already adjudged to us.

To secure, not to assure ourselves. To work : surely not because the work is already accomplished ; neither because it is already decreed that we shall work ; or that we shall unconditionally succeed, in our work ; but because we may neglect it, to our own perdition.

Let us therefore be cautious, how we accede to a doctrine of unconditional decrees ; which, if adopted, would compel us, to alter the strain of language, in which every precept of our holy religion is addressed to us. Let those who think they cannot extol the revealed wisdom of God, better than by insulting the faculties, with which he has been pleased to endow his creatures ; cease at length to employ their own faculties, in the perversion of his Sacred Word.

And let it not be said, that in calling your attention to the task assigned to us by our heavenly Father, I would detract from the freedom of his gifts, or the all-sufficiency of his bounty. We cordially acknowledge that “ every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights ;” that “ of his own will begat he us with the word of truth^s.” Moreover, that every good work, originates with that spirit, which is derived to man, through the me-

^s James i. 17, 18.

diation of his Redeemer : that as no exertion of human power ; no device of human wisdom, can restore to the lifeless clay, the soul by which it had been animated ; so when the life of the soul itself is extinguished, it can be re-kindled only by that sacred fire, which our Lord hath promised to shed from above.

But having advanced so far, let us not here stop short : remembering that error in religion, is, for the most part, little more than a partial admission of the truth. The lights of revealed wisdom, resembling those which the Creator hath scattered through the immensity of space, are not to be comprehended within the limits of a narrow theory. And much of what it concerns us to acknowledge and apply, is necessarily excluded from every system, by which, the weak but ambitious mind of man, would circumscribe the plans of Omnipotence. It is not for us, to draw an outline around the first Great Cause ; and especially such an outline, as would exclude the sphere of man's proper movements : that part of the general system, which though, comparatively, of little extent, is, to him, all-important : and where, whilst he is restrained, from diverging into the regions of darkness and death, by that superior influence which fills him with light and life, the activity of his movements is not repressed ; nor their spontaneity extinguished.

Therefore, whilst we acknowledge the extent

of the love of God, towards his undeserving creatures, let us not avert our eyes, from the course, whereby that love is rendered effective : but in the sphere of those duties he hath prescribed, let us recognize the appointed means of realizing those communications of his free spirit. And let us ever retain it in mind, that the same God, who hath declared to us his will, and supplied us with the opportunities of acting accordingly, requires that we should cherish every such suggestion, and improve every such opportunity ; with diligence, proportionate to the magnitude of the danger from which we would escape ; and the excellency of the prize, to which we are invited to aspire.

To conclude. From the whole tenor of Scripture, it appears, that the change, which it is the object of Christianity, to effect, is a change of affection and principle. That the measure of the Divine communications, though sufficient to help our infirmities, is not meant to supersede the necessity of vigilance and patient exertion, in this our state of probation and discipline : that our efforts are then availing, when proceeding from Christian dispositions, and regulated by Christian principles, they exert a reciprocal influence, in confirming and invigorating those dispositions and principles, by which we are governed. And on the contrary, that in every instance, wherein we suffer a good suggestion to pass through our minds, without allowing it a suitable influence on

our lives and conduct, we render our hearts the more callous, and our condition, the more hopeless: in the language of Scripture, we “grieve the spirit of God ^h.”

How careful then should we be, not to suffer our hopes of salvation, to rest on empty professions of faith; the sincerity of which, for want of self-examination, we may not have suspected; but endeavour, according to the directions of the Baptist, to “bring forth fruits meet for repentanceⁱ ;” that at the second coming of our Lord to judge the world, we may be found like those wise virgins, ready to hail the coming of the bridegroom, with lamps trimmed and burning.

What then is required of us? it may occur to some to ask. Of each; fidelity, in the discharge of the duties, belonging to the station, in which God hath placed him. And to a religious, and well-ordered mind, every such task, however small, will present to his view, that Being, from whom cometh the occasion and the command; the ability, and the inclination. And if, in the performance of the task assigned him, he thus continues to be influenced, by the spirit of filial obedience to the will of God; we may, without hesitation, apply to such a one, that glorious promise, for which, the truth of Christ himself is engaged. “If a man love me, he will keep my words, and the

^h Ephes. iv. 30.

ⁱ Matt. iii. 8.

Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him^k."

How then, is such a religion at variance with our temporal interests or satisfactions? or where is the austerity in those lessons of heavenly wisdom, which teach us, in all the concerns of this life, to behold our God? to regard our worldly duties as his commands; and the means of enjoyment, as the supplies of his providence? Are our innocent satisfactions, rendered less complete, or our duties more burthensome, by these reflexions? Those who entertain these apprehensions of the religion of the Gospel, are yet to prove its influence. They will then confess, that in spiritualizing our concerns, it soothes the irksomeness of our journey through life, with the consolations of inward peace; and heightens every satisfaction, with the prospect of a more solid and durable happiness: securing to the sincere believer, according to the commendation of the Apostle, not only the inheritance of the life to come, but even of that which now is.

But the misfortune is, that when conscience does not permit us, to apply to ourselves these consolations, we are ready to grasp at every pretext, however slender, which may silence that inward monitor, and reconcile us to ourselves. We transfer the charge of our alienation from God, on the society, of which we ourselves are members,

^k John xiv. 23.

and of whose vices we bear our part. Nay, under the strong delusions of self-love, we shrink not from the impiety of arraigning the Providence of God himself, by charging our transgressions against his will, to the very provisions of his goodness: and in the spirit derived from our first parent, we accost him in language, similar to that of Adam, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave unto me, and I did eat¹."

Alas, my friends! whatever, be the circumstances of our external condition, the occasions of temptation, will never be wanting, to a mind constitutionally weak, and habitually corrupt. I readily admit that the practice and opinions of the world, may constitute some of the most serious difficulties, and most urgent temptations, which beset us. But in the midst of these difficulties by which we are encompassed, the truly religious mind, will not fail to recognize the hand of an all-disposing Providence, as described by the Apostle, making "all things work together for good, to them that love God^m." He will not fail to acknowledge that a weak and imperfect Being, such as man, is to be improved, only by being exposed to temptations proportionably urgent: that if these be removed, or weakened; the fulfilment of his duties, is no longer attended with any internal conflict: and there being no work of self-subjugation, the power of self-government,

¹ Gen. iii. 12.

^m Rom. viii. 28.

like every other unexercised faculty, must necessarily languish. Hence he will perceive, that Heaven would not be the proper school of discipline, for corrupted man. And that the world in which he is placed, is not only more suited to the present constitution of his moral nature, but also more favourable to that improvement, by which he is to be qualified for a better. In fine, he will acknowledge, among the means which God hath ordained for his spiritual advancement, a course of moral discipline, abounding in occasions for the exercise of every Christian and moral virtue; and with obstacles, which, being not insurmountable, are sufficient to keep up a perpetual excitement.

The love of God is indeed the soul of every Christian virtue. The love of God, as he appears in the face of Christ Jesus, is the vivifying light, and genial heat, which attracts, expands, and purifies the affections of the heart; and constitutes every virtue in the character of the Christian. But, nevertheless, it must be admitted, that those virtues which aspire towards Heaven, and partake of its lustre, must be planted in an earthly mould, and rooted and confirmed by exposure to the severities of an inclement atmosphere; that without this treatment, their growth is sickly and feeble, ready to languish and fade at the first assault of temptation. They are the produce of the seed sown on the rock, which

springing up, seems fair and goodly to the eye, but having no depth of root is unable to endure the beams of the meridian sun.

Is there not, therefore, reason to suspect ourselves, when we impute our errors or misconduct to the circumstances of our external condition? That we abuse, as a palliative of vice, those means of deliverance, which the Providence of God hath furnished? How much better, if conforming to the intention of that Providence, we should, learn to extract good out of evil? Is the censure and commendation of the world at variance with the commands of Heaven? Then let us, in opposition to those difficulties, persevere in the line of duty; and that deference which is refused to the authority of man, shall be added to our confidence in God. Does the rapacity of others provoke us to retaliation? Let us, notwithstanding these provocations, continue in the habits of moderation and justice; and that power, which we rescue from a sinful passion, shall be added to our zeal in fulfilling all justice. Does the ingratitude of those we may have served, tempt us to abandon the cause, to which humanity would impel us? Let us persevere in the exercise of benevolence, in spite of that ingratitude; and that which is denied to the suggestions of self-love or resentment, shall be added to the purity and strength of our philanthropy.

Temptations and difficulties thus surmounted,

we may regard, not merely as an escape from vice, but a victory acquired. Not only a resistance to the suggestions of sin, but a conquest from the dominions of Satan ; a new supply to our strength, and an advancement in the spiritual kingdom of our blessed Redeemer. Such is the use we should make of the obstructions placed in our way, by the vanity or the wickedness of the world; and of the allurements to vice, which belong to its example. There is one example which we may follow, in the fullest persuasion that it will not mislead us. Even the example of Him, who for our instruction and encouragement, placed himself in circumstances, not only of the keenest bodily distress and suffering, but also most trying to those virtues of resignation, of patience, and of fortitude, which he came to display and to recommend. Maintaining the prevailing strength of his consolation, by declaring, that it was, to him, meat and drink, to do the will of his Father who had sent him.

May God, of his infinite mercy, grant that we may, by the light of his blessed example, so acquit ourselves in the task assigned us, that when we shall stand before Him in judgment, we may be found among those good and profitable servants, who shall be invited to enter into the joy of their Lord.

NOTE.

IT has been asserted by theologians of the Calvinistic school, that the doctrine of absolute decrees takes nothing from the activity of human endeavours after righteousness: that this depends on the acknowledged connexion between their present efforts and their future condition; and not on the manner in which that connexion is made out: that men will naturally proceed in the same course, and with the same industry, to ascertain that they are the objects of God's special favour, as they would to render themselves acceptable to him; and, consequently, that so far as practical morality is concerned, it is indifferent, whether their doings are regarded by them, as influential on their future condition, or as indications of the decrees of the Almighty, by which that condition is unalterably determined.

Now the truth of this representation may be questioned. It is certain, that in the affairs of common life, at least as they are generally conducted, men are determined to action, by the supposed efficiency of what they do, and not by a motive of curiosity to ascertain what is already allotted to them: they take food in order to prolong life, not to assure themselves that it shall be continued; they take medicine to recover health, not to satisfy themselves that it shall be restored to them. Such is the nature of the connexion which is commonly supposed to exist, between our proceedings

and the advantages of the present life; and we are naturally led by analogy, to suppose that it is the same kind of connexion which is established, between our conduct here, and the interests of a future state.

It were easy to account for this persuasion, respecting the nature of the connexion between our actions, and the advantages which are expected to follow; and this, on principles, which, so far from tending to impeach, would rather serve to prove the justness of this view of the subject. But the present question relates to the influence of motives to obedience, as it depends on the view we take of the connexion between our conduct here, and our condition hereafter. And however men of speculation may satisfy themselves, that nothing is taken from the efficacy of motives, by their representations on this subject; I doubt not it will be admitted, that mankind in general, are disposed to attribute greater importance to conducive means, than to simple indications; and that such will proceed, in the course prescribed, with more vigilance and greater industry, when the motive is, not to convince themselves that they are in that course, (which is nonsense), nor to assure themselves that they shall arrive at the end proposed; but in order that they may arrive at it.

Further; as it is natural and usual for men, to suppose that they are free agents, with respect to the activity or direction of their endeavours, for the advantages offered to them in the present life; it must be, also, natural for them to suppose that they are free, in the exertions they make, for the attainment of those, offered to their hopes in the life to come. And it will scarcely be doubted, that this is the most influential view they can take of their own agency; that they will

be excited to greater vigilance, self-watchfulness, and patient continuance in well-doing, by the persuasion that they are free to choose, and therefore justly accountable for the course they take; than by supposing that they are not free agents in this business; but that both their final condition, and all their proceedings believed to be connected with it, are alike immutably fixed, in the eternal counsels of God.

Men of speculation should therefore be cautious not to lessen the little morality there is in the world, by disturbing the notions of mankind, respecting the connexion between their conduct and the rewards annexed to it: especially when it is considered, that the received opinions on this subject, are the most natural and influential.

If they will not listen to the suggestions of common reason, let them, at least, respect those which are offered to them in the word of God. There they will find, that whilst the greatest helps and encouragements are offered to our weakness, we are still treated as free agents, in the use we are required to make of them: and that the language of its exhortations, is strictly conformable to the received notions, respecting the efficiency of our endeavours; pointing out a certain course, for the attainment of a certain end, viz. everlasting life; and not in order that we may discover the end, at which we must infallibly arrive: directing us so to run, that we may obtain, that we may gain, that we may win, the high prize of our calling.

If it could be supposed that this language was adopted by the inspired writers, in accommodation to the received opinions of conduciveness, though the connexion between our present conduct and future condi-

tion, is, in reality, that which some few philosophers have imagined; still it might shew, with what respect, received opinions should be treated. But we are not warranted in making this supposition. Nay, if it were not an abuse of the Word of God, to apply to it for the determination of metaphysical questions, it might be satisfactorily proved, that our present doings, are something more than the indications of our future prospects. It may be sufficient to observe, that whatever end is answered by our obedience; the same is that, which the Deity hath proposed to himself, in all his precepts. Now though these instructions may, indeed, be the means of affording certain anticipations, to those who are directed by them; and this, no doubt, would be a great accession to their present happiness; it will scarcely be supposed, that this temporary satisfaction, is the sole end, of all those revelations of his will, which God has made to us. Yet to this, is their value reduced, if, whilst they are intended for the direction of our conduct, our obedience is good for nothing else.

It will be said, that though human actions are admitted to be conducive to the ends in which they terminate, yet nothing is gained thereby; inasmuch, as means as well as ends, are alike comprized in the eternal and unchangeable counsels of God. That he who hath fixed the ultimate destination of each individual, hath fixed, by the same immutable decree, the course by which he should be conducted thither. On this I observe, that the same determinations, must therefore have included the inclinations, dispositions, affections, and principles, by which he is actuated and guided, in the use of the means of grace to be employed by him; and, therefore, that according to this scheme,

man is but a passive instrument, in all that relates to the formation of his spiritual or moral character. I would ask, then, what becomes of the notion of responsibility? Nay, is it not evident, that this representation of the subject, would make God the author of moral, as well as of natural evil? That it would terminate in Atheism, or a system of religion not less frightful?

But it is asserted, and, we are persuaded, truly asserted, that those who hold the doctrine of unconditional decrees, are (at least many of them) zealous advocates for the maintainance of moral virtue. This is no defence. It is well that men's speculative errors, have not that influence on their practice, which we are apt to imagine. The moral conduct is the result of the moral character; and this itself, is the effect of numberless impressions, made perhaps in our earlier years, by noble examples, exciting admiration or something of a spirit of generous emulation; and recommended by the expressions of approbation, which we hear on all sides. These impressions are not easily effaced, by a few speculative opinions, addressed to the head and not to the heart; and adopted, at a period of life when the moral sentiments and habits are already formed, and perhaps firmly established. But under this admission, the advocates of an erroneous doctrine are not to take shelter. In the examination of their opinions, they must be prepared to see them run up to their legitimate consequences; and if these are adverse to morality or religion, they must admit, that the reasoning, by which this contrariety is made out, amounts to a practical refutation. Neither their moral characters, nor the sincerity of their professions for the interests of virtue, are questioned, by him who conceives that their opi-

nions may be inconsistent with these professions. Nay, it is this agreement in the truths of practical religion, that enables him to reason with them. For when he runs up their opinions to a conclusion, which contradicts or invalidates the truths which are, on both sides, admitted; he conceives that the refutation is complete, and the disputant silenced. The Epicureans, as well as other sects of ancient philosophers, professed the strongest regard for the interests of virtue; and many among them proved by their moral conduct, the sincerity of these professions. Yet Cicero would not admit that this was any defence of the dogmas of that school, which they held in opposition to these sentiments. “*Non quero quid dicat,*” Epicurus “*sed quid convenienter rationi possit, et sententiæ suæ dicere.*”

We have here admitted, all that we can admit, relative to a system of faith, which has for its foundation the doctrine of unconditional decrees. It may be harmless, to those who are otherwise fortified against its influence. But who are they? Not those, by whom these opinions are brought to bear on the motives or principles of obedience; which are thereby weakened or undermined. Nor those, who hold these opinions without reasoning from them. All who hold, that their final destination is fixed by an unconditional decree, are naturally led to encourage the persuasion, that the communications of divine grace, are sufficient for the end proposed, independently of human efforts. This, without reasoning, is sufficient to produce a relaxation of these efforts, and to render religion a matter of mere speculation.

To those who think they can hold the notion of absolute decrees, without detriment to the practical

influence of religion, it should be enough to observe, that the religion of the Gospel does not rest on a basis of metaphysics : that it takes not for its support, any of those theories, by which the acutest minds have ever been bewildered ; relative to free-will ; fixed fate, or what is the same thing, so far as man is concerned, the eternal and unchangeable counsels of God ; by which the present course, and final condition of each individual of his creation, is fixed from everlasting to everlasting. That whilst it represents the communications of light and strength, which God has made to us, as being requisite to enable us to accomplish his will ; its representation on this subject, is, not that the measure of these communications is sufficient to effect the purpose of moral reformation, independently of our own efforts ; but that the wonderful advantages, thus gratuitously afforded, shall be lost, to those who do not apply them to their own benefit, by active exertion. The question it suggests to each individual, is, " How shall I escape, if I neglect so great salvation * ? " The exhortations of Scripture, are all of them, agreeable to this notion. A remarkable one, has been already cited, in the body of the preceding discourse : but every other is in point. In all, the strain of language is that of a call, to use with diligence the helps afforded ; implying that they may be neglected or forfeited.

To conclude ; let the Calvinist admit the necessity of man's endeavours, to the security of his future interests ; and the liberty of self-determination, in such sense at least, as would leave him accountable for them ; and if

* Heb. ii. 3.

he can hold the doctrine of unconditional decrees, consistently with these admissions, we cannot object to his taking this or any other mode, by which he thinks he may help himself, to more worthy conceptions of the power and wisdom of the Great First Cause. Whatever dispute he may have with the metaphysician, he can have none with the Christian moralist. This last may stand by, a neutral spectator of the contest; not, perhaps, without some apprehension, that if the doctrine of absolute decrees were generally received, it must, in the minds of many, interfere with those persuasions, with which it is requisite they should be impressed, respecting the necessity of human endeavours, and the responsibility annexed to them: on the former of which, depends the strength of the motives, which Christianity proposes; and on the latter, the very existence of the duties it prescribes.

THE END.

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